12. 2. 7. C.

DISCOURSES

PREACHED BEFORE THE

HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

LINCOLN's-INN,

BY

THE ASSISTANT-PREACHER,

ROBERT NARES, A.M.

Chaplain to His Royal Highneſs the Duke of York, &c.

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1794.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT,

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER,

&c. &c. &c.

TREASURER

(FOR THE PRESENT YEAR)

TO THE

HON. SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S INN,

THESE

DISCOURSES

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

May 1,
1794.

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DISCOURSE I.

ON THE MEANS OF REVIVING THE TRUE SPIRIT OF PIETY.

ROMANS XIV. 19.

Let us [therefore] follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

THE deſign of the chriſtian law is to exalt the nature of man, and make him fit for the ſociety and fellowſhip of higher beings. Hence is it that, in every aſpect, the contemplation of a Chriſtian, ſuch as he ought to be, preſents us with a nobler view of human nature than we can attain by any other means. Societies of men conſidered without reference to any religion, merely as they exiſt in this world, and as having in it the beginning and the end of their being, what are they but aſſemblages of animals? wonderful indeed in their faculties and pro-

perties above all others of that numerous claſs; but ſtill, united with them in death, and confounded with them in the ſubſequent diſſolution of their organs: of no higher origin, nor higher end.—Such are men, according to thoſe who reject religion, and diſclaim the doctrine of a future life. Obſerve their purſuits, and you will find them conſonant to this account; terminating in objects of no great value or duration, yet ſought with an ardour wholly diſproportioned to their worth: and though the eagerneſs of men for theſe their ſhort-lived ſatisfactions would be in ſome degree palliated by the ſuppoſition that they had nothing further to expect (which is indeed the common plea and argument of irreligious ſenſualiſts,) yet nothing can excuſe the ſelfiſh and malicious manner in which they are and ever will be ſtruggled for, by thoſe who have no higher notions. We may indeed expect on grounds of reaſon, that beings who have hope in this world only, and foreſight to aſſure them of their ſhort continuance here, will be contentious for the pleaſures which this world affords, as for their all; yet, expecting this, we cannot but regard the creatures which we find thus ſituated as

wicked

wicked and pernicious animals, whoſe chief propenſities incline them to injure and ſupplant each other.

Very different is the proſpect that preſents itſelf in the contemplation of real Chriſtians. We ſee there, indeed, creatures of much infirmity, liable to fall into errors, and even into guilt, but at the ſame time connected with a better order of things, and tending towards it; occupied of courſe, in ſome degree, with the buſineſs and the pleaſures of this preſent world, but conſidering both as ſubordinate and greatly inferior to the concerns of a future life, which is to be of infinitely greater duration; and, for the ſake of that life, attentive rather to the *duties* of the preſent, than to any other of its demands. Not contentious about worldly honours, pleaſures, or advantages, becauſe intent on higher objects; yet not neglectful of them in proportion to their proper eſtimation; and ſincerely and humbly thankful for them when beſtowed by providence: above all things, friendly to each other, knowing not only that the principal object of their deſire is attainable by all, but that it may be better and more effectually

ſought by their conſpiring efforts, than by the ſeparate attempts of any.

To theſe peculiar virtues of chriſtian ſocieties the apoſtle intended to direct his converts, when he exhorted them in the words which I have taken as a text, " To follow " after the things which make for peace, " and things wherewith they might edify " one another."

By *the things which make for peace*, St. Paul meant more eſpecially, (as the preceding verſes fully ſhow,) ſuch actions as evince a mutual toleration of infirmities, and a quiet profeſſion of their private ſentiments, without moleſting or offending others; even giving way in matters of indifference, or of ſmall importance, rather than the ſpirit of contention or diſſent ſhould riſe among them.

The other part of the exhortation, " to " follow after thoſe things by which *we may* " *edify one another*," does not lie within ſo ſmall a compaſs; ſince the acts are wholly innumerable by which Chriſtians may edify each other, and mutually promote their hopes of heavenly bleſſings. Every thing that belongs to *inſtruction*, *admonition*, *reproof*, and *good example*, falls under this claſs; and all

of

of theſe are bound upon us, as duties, by this ſingle precept of the teacher. It is our buſineſs to make the application to ourſelves, and to profit by it to the utmoſt of our power. For my own part, I am convinced that a candid examination of the duties ariſing from this latter precept, with due reflection on our own neglect in the performance of them, would lead to much inſtruction, moſt important and moſt neceſſary for us. Or, to put it in another way, more convenient, perhaps, for ſuch a view as we can take at preſent, let us conſider the religious evils of our actual ſituation, and then enquire whether the duties here enjoined by the apoſtle would not afford us the moſt ſure and efficacious remedy. —To know our real ſtate is one great part of wiſdom, and to know the means by which we may amend it, is yet a further advance: there is wanting beyond theſe, only the will to put the means in uſe; and this a proper ſtatement of the former part may tend, perhaps, to excite.

It is, I think, but too undeniable, that in this age the ſpirit of religion has become extremely weak; far from being the exalted creatures which I have juſt deſcribed as real

Chriſtians, the preſent Chriſtians bear the name with very few of the diſtinctive marks. Many, indeed, have renounced even the name; but among thoſe who retain it, and make a general profeſſion of the faith, to conſider the negligence there is with reſpect to ſome duties, the total contempt of others, the general indifference about chriſtian knowledge, the forgetfulneſs of chriſtian hopes, and the violence of deſire and contention with which all temporal advantages are ſought, may lead our imaginations rather to that picture of creatures without religion, and devoid of future hopes, which I gave in the beginning of this diſcourſe, than to any thing that properly diſplays the character of Chriſtians.

From vices, however, and even from the vice of worldly-mindedneſs, no times of Chriſtianity have yet been wholly exempt: but this peculiar crime of indifference, riſing frequently into a total alienation from religion, and a fear of even ſeeming to profeſs it, has never, ſurely, been ſo prevalent as within the preſent century.—The general cauſe of this has been the increaſe of fancied knowledge, and the pride of imaginary wiſdom.—The fact is not that real knowledge has not

alſo

alſo increaſed, and that great and ſolid wiſdom has not alſo appeared; but theſe good things, like every earthly advantage, have had ſome counterbalance of attendant evil. Vanity and preſumption have always made a ſtride beyond the progreſs of real knowledge, and true wiſdom; and while theſe have ſtruck out diſcoveries of ſome importance in the ſyſtem of nature, and improvements in many arts, and gained a few ſteps in ſcience, both moral and divine, thoſe have hurried themſelves with blind precipitation into the abyſs of metaphyſics; and there, immerſed in central darkneſs, have imagined that they diſcovered, and could demonſtrate, whatever pernicious fancies the *ruler of the darkneſs of this world* thought it moſt expedient for his purpoſes to ſuggeſt.

The novelty, or at leaſt, the apparent novelty, of theſe excurſions, with a certain brilliancy of genius by which the reſults were artfully ſet forth, together with the diſſolute manners of ſome corrupt courts, prevailed unhappily ſo far as to give them currency, and to render irreligion faſhionable. If we look back a very little further into hiſtory we ſhall find it otherwiſe; but thus it has been for

ſome time, and the evil, I hope, has paſt its height.

A favourable period ſeems at length to have arrived for ſhaking off this torpid malady. Thoſe writings which for a time ſeduced ſo many, have loſt the grace of novelty, and have had their futility expoſed; they are ſinking rapidly into oblivion;—and religion, never ſilenced by reaſon, but for a time apparently overborne by clamour, may now again be heard. In the conflict ſhe has manifeſted a ſtrength which to the end of time will be her glory; and her friends have only now to improve the good poſition in which ſhe has eſtabliſhed their force.

During the continuance of theſe diſputes, amidſt abundance of raillery and ridicule, which, though they could not move the wiſe who were few, yet caught the weak and unſteady who were many, and kept them greatly in awe of what ſome ſophiſts would gladly have eſtabliſhed as the final *teſt of truth*. In theſe circumſtances, I ſay, it became a kind of faſhion to ſuppreſs religious ſentiments, to ſuffer them by all imaginable methods to be diſcountenanced in public, and to retain them, if at all, among the ſecrets of the

the heart, known only to him to whom all hearts are open.

Not to expatiate upon the unchriſtian puſillanimity, and the guilt of ſuch conduct, the effect of it upon the public morals has been alarming and deſtructive. They who judge chiefly by appearances, and are influenced very greatly by the example of their ſuperiors, I mean the lower orders of ſociety, ſeeing ſo little appearance of religion in thoſe above them, and ſo little anxiouſneſs to preſerve even an outward reſpect to it, have been tempted, in too many inſtances, to throw it off entirely, and we are puniſhed for our guilty negligence by an extended profligacy, which at length is felt and lamented, but which it muſt be the work of time, and of many ſerious efforts, to repreſs and to reform.

The great work is, however, begun; and the zeal with which ſome inſtitutions of that tendency have been taken up and ſupported, affords, at preſent, a pleaſing ſymptom of amendment, and will, no doubt, in time produce its due effect.

But in the interval we are ſtrongly called upon to quicken and extend our diligence, and, with the general attention which the apoſtle

apoſtle enjoins, "to follow after *all things* "wherewith we may *edify* one another." The ſpirit of religion muſt be revived among us, and we muſt ceaſe to be aſhamed, with a fooliſh and a guilty ſhame, of thoſe things which are in truth our greateſt glory; not forgetting that of thoſe who are now aſhamed of Chriſt, he alſo will ſurely be aſhamed when he ſits on the tribunal of Omnipotence.

Some of thoſe things by which we may edify one another I will here conciſely enumerate, as an aid or guide to that obedience which is due to the apoſtle's precept.

The firſt and moſt obvious of theſe is *the Education of Children*. For by edifying one another we are not to underſtand too ſtrictly and literally a mutual edification, or reciprocation of inſtruction, but the edifying of all thoſe in every ſtation on whom we may have an opportunity of conferring that great benefit. With reſpect to children, it has been very artfully inculcated by the enemies of religion, and not without conſiderable effect, that the choice of religious opinions is a work of mature judgment, and therefore ought to be left altogether to the deciſion of mature age; and that in the mean time the mind

ſhould

ſhould be left free from every bias of prejudice, and indifferent to every determination. This, like every other fallacy, has ſome foundation in truth. It is true that the final deciſion upon religious opinions is a work of mature judgment; but it is not true that in this matter prejudices are ſo greatly to be apprehended, or that it is ſo difficult, as is inſinuated, to throw off the early bias of education. How many have we ſeen who, after every care taken in their youth to impreſs them with chriſtian principles, have run the whole courſe of infidelity, and ſhown themſelves throughout life exempt from every charge of prejudice in favour of religion! Nor can the mind be kept in ſuch a neutral ſtate as theſe inſtructors recommend. "He that is not for "me," ſays our Saviour, "is againſt me," and the child that does not learn religion will learn irreligion. Beſides, the leiſure of early life is the only convenient opportunity ſome men ever have for learning any thing of religion; immerſed afterwards in the hurry of buſineſs, and the temptations of life, they have need rather of previous knowledge to keep them ſteady, than of diſputes about firſt principles. A Chriſtian has much to learn,

which

which the docile mind of a child (a pattern in that reſpect for man, and as ſuch recommended to imitation) very readily receives; but which will afterwards, without more leiſure than many men will chooſe to find, be attained but very imperfectly: and thus, by way of being impartial, we may leave one ſide of the queſtion altogether unheard. The ſummary creed of infidelity, "*I believe* "*nothing*," is learned, if it be worth learning, at any time, and without any ſtudy, ſo that no proviſions need be made for that acquirement: and if a man muſt of neceſſity ſet out in life with prejudices, it is better, on many accounts, for himſelf and for the world, that he ſhould have ſuch as make him feel reſponſible for what he does, than ſuch as encourage him to indulge his paſſions, at that time the ſtrongeſt, and to throw off all reſtraint.—For theſe reaſons, and for many more which the ſubject will naturally ſuggeſt to every reaſonable mind, let us begin our reformation of the times by edifying where we have moſt power to edify, by inſtilling into children, from their earlieſt years, the love of God and the true ſpirit of religion.

And,

And, as among the means of doing this, and of edifying, at the ſame time, a larger circle of inmates and dependents, let me ſtrenuouſly recommend the excellent, but too long neglected practice of domeſtic prayer. The picture of a maſter of a family kneeling at the head of his houſhold, and recommending them and himſelf, in ſolemn prayer, to the protection and bleſſing of heaven, is one of thoſe which we know is pleaſing in the ſight of God; and which would be, if our taſte were as correct in this, as in ſome inferior matters, in the ſight of man, affecting and ſublime. The effect of this good example would be powerful and extenſive, and, as in every other caſe of practical goodneſs, much more edifying than mere admonition, inſtruction, or reproof, which, however, may be fitly joined with it whenever there ſhall be occaſion. To the revival of this excellent practice, ſo conſonant to reaſon, and ſo ſtrongly required by religion, the chief obſtacle will be the remains of that falſe ſhame of which I have already ſpoken, and the conſequent fear of appearing, what very few are in any danger of becoming, righteous over-much.

A third

A third great branch of the duty of *edifying one another*, and the laſt on which I ſhall at preſent inſiſt, is that which has been very long neglected, from the cauſes above ſpecified, of paying on all occaſions an open and public reſpect to religion. Under this head are compriſed, as neceſſary parts, a general veneration for the inſtitutions of the church, and particularly for the obſervance of the Lord's Day, and other high days of religious commemoration, with care to ſet a good example in the public notice of them; a regular attendance upon public worſhip, which they who are vain enough to think not edifying to themſelves, ought to know to be edifying in the public eye; the ſtanding teſtimony of national religion, the means of extending its influence, and the only method by which we can hope to propitiate the Almighty in favour of that whole ſociety, in the welfare of which we are moſt intereſted, and which we call our native country.

By theſe means, and by others analogous to theſe, aſſiſted by the bleſſing of God, we may hope gradually to revive among us the true ſpirit and active zeal of Chriſtianity: and that it may be indeed the ſpirit of Chriſtianity,

tianity, and not any evil ſpirit in the ſemblance of it, ſuch as too often has tormented the world, let us keep in mind the former part of the apoſtle's admonition: and be mindful while we follow thoſe things wherewith we may edify one another, to purſue thoſe alſo, which make for peace: being aſſured that whatever does not tend to peace and brotherly affection, is not of Chriſt. The effectuating theſe great purpoſes, as it muſt reſult from the joint efforts of all, is incumbent in due part and proportion, according to his means and opportunities, on every individual. Happy they who, before the final tribunal of judgment, ſhall be able to plead, that, throughout life, they were diligent, not only to work out their own ſalvation, but alſo to promote the peace of the church, and by all means in their power to effect the edification of others. Theſe will ſurely be found worthy to have their lot with thoſe exalted beings, a great part of whoſe felicity ariſes from the diffuſion of a pure benevolence among them, accompanied by the bleſſing of God, which, if we fulfil theſe terms, will reſt on us, as well as upon them, for ever and for ever.

Now to God, &c.

DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

ON THE SUBLIMITY OF DEVOTION.

LAM. JER. iii. 41.

Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

THE expreſſion of lifting up our hearts or ſouls to heaven, which is not uncommon in ſcripture, is admirably calculated to deſcribe that elevation and ſublimity of feeling which naturally accompanies the movements of true devotion. In circumſtances and ſituations by which theſe ſenſations are ſtrongly excited, the ſoul ſeems almoſt detached from her terreſtrial confinement, and united in communion with ſpirits congenial to herſelf.

This obſervation, the juſtice of which will be readily confeſſed by all who are capable of ſuch feelings, leads directly to a truth which

ſeems to have been too little conſidered, being of a nature to have a powerful influence on many minds, which is this; *that the fineſt and moſt ſublime ſenſations of which the ſoul of man is ſuſceptible, are connected with the principle of devotion.* In this remark religion is preſented to us in one of the moſt amiable and attractive of her aſpects; an illuſtration of it, therefore, may be highly uſeful in reviving the general attachment to her, and in diſpelling the cloud of prejudice from thoſe darkened minds, which expect I know not what of dulneſs and inſipidity in every thing pertaining to devotion. If thoſe ſweet, but powerful emotions of ſublimity, for the ſake of which men fly with ſo much eagerneſs to the works of exalted genius, and to produce which is their higheſt boaſt, the baſis of their nobleſt fame, can be ſhown to belong more peculiarly to religion, there muſt be an end of that ill-founded reproach; and it muſt be confeſſed that, in the exerciſes of piety, a cold and languid inſenſibility is diſgraceful only to the heart that harbours it.

An enquiry into the nature of the ſublime would be altogether unſuitable to this time and place. Let us be contented then to take the deciſion of the queſtion as we find it given by

by others.—The moſt perfect account appears to be this, " that it is the idea of *power*, in " ſome ſhape or other inſinuating itſelf, which " produces in all caſes the ſenſation of *ſubli-* " *mity**." If this theory be juſt, and it has every appearance of being ſo, we have all that we can poſſibly deſire for the demonſtration of our preſent remark: an aſſumption taken up on purpoſe could not more exactly accord. The contemplation of Omnipotence, the higheſt and moſt perfect power the univerſe contains, the fountain of all other power that does or can exiſt, is the due and proper province of religion. To trace the effects, to acknowledge the dominion, and to conceive as fully as poſſible the glory of that tranſcendent Power, is the eſſential employment of devotion. No wonder then, if we find ſublimity, where its very eſſence is acknowledged to reſide, in connection with power, and that infinite in degree: and we may reſt ſatisfied with the full deciſion of theory in favour of the remark which is now ſelected for examination.

It remains only to illuſtrate the doctrine by ſhowing it to be altogether confirmed by experience.

* Blair.

If devotion be, in its own nature, a ſublime feeling, the records of the true religion ought eminently to poſſeſs that character of ſublimity. In this, our expectation is not deceived: the ſublimeſt books exiſting are thoſe from which we learn our faith. The writings of the inſpired penmen abound with paſſages for which no parallel can be found in the productions of mere genius. On theſe holy books the marks of the divinity are every where ſtamped in characters of ſimple dignity, and genuine, unaffected ſimplicity, which are not to be found in any human compoſitions. The ſacred volume is, as it were, the tabernacle of the Moſt High ſtill remaining among us, pervaded throughout by the brightneſs of his preſence, and the tranſcendent majeſty of his power. To recite examples of this high excellence, pleaſing as it might be to do ſo, may fairly be eſteemed ſuperfluous; my hearers are, I truſt, ſufficiently acquainted with the treaſures of inſpiration to recal ſuch paſſages to their own recollection. There are writings in which it is expreſsly undertaken, and the fact is in general acknowledged. Even they who have not in all reſpects ſubmitted to the authority of ſcripture, have, in general, been obliged

to

to confeſs its ſublimity; though in ſo doing they have granted, perhaps, ſomething more than they intended: this ſublimity of holy writ being, among others, no mean argument of its authenticity. Had it contained only a vain and fabulous theology, theſe characters of auguſt grandeur, and true elevation, had ſurely been wanting to it. The efforts of the moſt pre-eminent genius could ſcarcely raiſe above abſurdity the dreams of the pagan ſyſtem; the moſt ſublime and celebrated deſcription of the ſupreme deity of heathenism, implies a conception of him in a human form, with the darkeſt hair, and overhanging eye-brows *: but the more general and purer ideas of an infinite ſpirit, as ſuggeſted by genuine religion; Eternity, Immenſity, Omnipreſence, Omnipotence, the attributes, actions and decrees of an all-wiſe and all-perfect Deity,—what emotions are too elevated for them to excite, when delivered in the language of truth? Hear the teſtimony of one, whoſe unexampled inconſiſtency, joined to the moſt exalted talents, was, in ſome reſpects, unfavourable to the cauſe of religion; but whoſe right ſentiments on this ſubject

* Hom. Il. A. 528.

appear to have been extorted by irreſiſtible feeling. "The majeſty of the ſcriptures," ſays this writer, "fills me with aſtoniſhment, "the holineſs of the goſpel ſpeaks to my "very heart. Behold the books of the phi- "loſophers, with all their pomp, how little "are they in compariſon!—Is it poſſible that "a book at once ſo wiſe and ſo ſublime ſhould "have been the production of mere men *."

Having cited this ample acknowledgement from one in many reſpects hoſtile to the cauſe of revealed religion, let us proceed, as a further illuſtration of our doctrine, to conſider ſome of the ſituations of real life, which tend to prove the intimate connection between devotion, and the ſources of ſublime feeling within us.

Firſt then, in the retirement of the cloſet to what ſpeculations will the mind of the devout be directed? While under the impreſſion of that principle, probably, to the contemplation of God. How much of ſublimity is neceſſarily adjoined to the true notions of the Supreme Being, has been already ſuggeſted; nor will any one be hardy enough to aſſert that a more exalted topic of conſidera-

* Rouſſeau, Penſées, p. 3.

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tion can poſſibly be conceived. But it may be ſaid, with ſome plauſibility, that the being and attributes of the Creator are matters much too high above us, to act upon our minds with powerful energy. That, dazzled and confounded with the proſpect of infinity, the underſtanding of man, employed upon this ſubject, muſt ſink under the ſenſe of its own inſufficiency; and, inſtead of experiencing the vigorous impreſſions of ſublime emotion, muſt feel only the languor and the ſhame of baffled weakneſs. Thus, indeed, to unaſſiſted man it eaſily might happen. But from this diſappointment the nature of our divine religion reſcues us: we are not left to bewilder ourſelves in the labyrinth of infinity, where all we could diſcover would be our hopeleſs ignorance; it has pleaſed God to declare to us, in part, what he is; and to encourage us to raiſe our thoughts to him, by revealing to us, even in our preſent ſtate of imperfection, ſomething of the brightneſs of his glory. Aſſiſted by this ſupernatural aid, the devout Chriſtian, in his ſecret contemplations, lifts up his thoughts, not to an unknown being, like the Athenians of old, but to the Lord Jehovah, to the Creator and

Lord of heaven and earth, to the Holy One of Iſrael, the God of peace, of patience, and conſolation *; who, though throned in everlaſting majeſty, vouchſafes to look upon the ſons of men; who, though offended by innumerable tranſgreſſions, ſo loved the world that he ſent his only-begotten Son, to the end that they who believe in him may not periſh, but have everlaſting life; who hath ſent, ſince him, the ever-bleſſed Comforter to guide us, if we refuſe not his guidance, into all truth.—To this God, thus deſcribed and ſpecified, to the myſterious union of this Holy Trinity, are the contemplations of chriſtian devotion directed: to this object does the votary of true religion in ſolitude and retirement lift up his ſoul; and, though it be with humbleneſs, and with a full conviction that to him the ways of God are of neceſſity inſcrutable, yet it is with confidence that he ſurely knows both of his ways and of his goodneſs, ſo much at leaſt as it hath pleaſed him to reveal: and ever when his own conceptions fail through weakneſs, and fall ſhort of the ſublimity of the ſubject, the ſacred volume is at hand to aſſiſt and invigorate

* 1 Theſſ. v. 2. and Rom. xv. 5, 33.

his

his imagination. Whence, though hitherto I have declined it, I cannot now refrain from citing at leaſt a ſingle inſtance of the richneſs of its ſublime deſcription. Speaking of the power of God, it is ſaid in the book of Job, that "He ſtretcheth out the north over the "empty place, and hangeth the earth upon "nothing; He bindeth up the waters in his "thick clouds, and the clouds are not rent "under them. He holdeth back the face "of his throne, and ſpreadeth his cloud up-"on it. He hath compaſſed the water with "bounds, until the day and night come to "an end. The pillars of heaven tremble and "are aſtoniſhed at his reproof *." More, I think, need not be ſaid to prove that the contemplations to which devotion leads, are in their own nature elevated and ſublime.—And though they may not all turn ſpecifically upon the attributes and perfections of the Deity, they are all related to the ſame ſubject; and bear in them, more or leſs, the impreſſion of a ſimilar character.

To be convinced of this, let us, inſtead of purſuing the devout man to his cloſet, attend him to the field. There, when he beholds

* Job xxvi. 7, &c.

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the beauteous order of creation, the ſplendor and magnificence of the ſky above him, the richneſs and variety of the earth beneath, the vigour of life and health that glows around him, and the materials of abundant enjoyment, conſiſtent, if rightly uſed, with nature, with reaſon and religion, and poured out on every ſide with unbounded profuſion; then, when his heart exulting in the proſpect and participation of ſo much collected good, yearns towards the Divine Beſtower, and exclaims with fervour, "Theſe are thy glorious works, "Almighty Father, and theſe thy bounties!" who ſhall deny that his ſenſations are ſublime, or perſuade him that the ſame objects, without this reference to heaven, without this aſſiſtance from the feelings of devotion, can poſſibly excite an equal tranſport. Another may enjoy the contemplation of magnificence, may be pleaſed with the proſpect of beauty, order, and variety, and feel the warmth of admiration; but on the devout man alone will theſe conſiderations operate with their fulleſt influence. He only will proceed, by a rapid tranſition, from the creatures to the Creator, and regard the perfections of his works as a repreſentation, and, as it were a foretaſte, of the

the infinitely higher excellencies of their holy Author. To him moſt truly it is that "the "heavens declare the glory of God!"

Or if from great and general views of expanded nature, he deſcend to a more minute examination of its parts, ſenſations of the ſame exalted kind will ſtill continue to be excited. He will never, in the minuteſt of his reſearches, loſe ſight of the great and admirable Contriver; but tracing the unerring wiſdom and unbounded power of the Deity in the ſmalleſt ſubdiviſions of his works, will find a dignity in objects uſually deſpiſed, and will perceive the trueſt magnificence, the marks of the moſt ſublime intelligence, united with apparent meanneſs.—Such are the ſenſations raiſed by the view of nature, whether general or particular, in the mind of the pious Chriſtian; who, though he love not *the world*, when under that name are comprehended the follies, the paſſions and the vices, of thoſe who are too truly its children: yet when he ſurveys it as the theatre of Almighty Providence, as a ſpecimen of unbounded Power, the reſult and the diſplay of unerring Wiſdom, cannot fail to have produced within him the tranſports of rational wonder, and the exalted fervour of grateful admiration.

"When

" When I conſider," ſays the Pſalmiſt, " the " heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon " and ſtars which thou haſt ordained;—what " is man that thou art mindful of him, and " the ſon of man that thou viſiteſt him? For " thou haſt made him a little lower than the " angels, and haſt crowned him with glory " and honour *."

To ſuch a height of noble ſpeculation can the ſpirit of religion exalt the minds of its profeſſors!—But it is not only in the contemplation of nature that theſe effects may be produced; in every circumſtance and ſituation the proper operation of religious thoughts is to call up ſuch ſublime and fervent feelings.—Is the devout man in proſperity?—He acknowledges the bounty of his Almighty Father, looks up to Him with earneſt gratitude, and, even in humbling himſelf before God, acquires a dignity, a firmneſs and an elevation of mind. Well knoweth he that " Bleſſed is the man that feareth the Lord, " that delighteth greatly in his command- " ments. He ſhall not be afraid of evil tid- " ings, his heart is fixed, truſting in the " Lord; his heart is eſtabliſhed, he ſhall not

* Pſal. viii. 3, &c.

" he

" be afraid *."—Such was the triumphant ſong of the inſpired monarch of Iſrael, and ſuch is the perſuaſion of the religious man; a perſuaſion naturally accompanied with energetic and ſublime emotion.

But do his worldly advantages fail, and leave him plunged in the waters of adverſity? Driven from the conſolations of the world, his ſpirit ſtill reſiſts, and riſes beneath the preſſure. He looks above this world, to a higher and more adequate aſſiſtance. " When " the waves of death compaſſed me; the " floods of ungodly men made me afraid; " the ſorrows of hell compaſſed me about, " the ſnares of death gat hold upon me.—In " my diſtreſs I called upon the Lord, and " cried unto my God †." Encouraged to this reliance by the higheſt and moſt expreſs authority, he turns from the afflictions that ſurround him, and in the proſpect of another world, if not in this, ſees hope and conſolation beam upon him. But is this high and ſolemn appeal made, think you, without any ſublime emotions? To paſs from the dark and gloomy regions of deſpair, to the ſplen-

* Pſal. cxii. 1. and 7.

† 2 Sam. xxii. 5, &c. Pſal. xviii. 4.

dor

dor of immortal hope, is it a dull or tame tranſition? The ſoul that is diſtreſſed, afflicted, and broken with the ills of life, feels it no exaltation, no warmth and energy of hope, in turning from the preſent evils to the fountain of all comfort, and the ſource of inexhauſtible benevolence?——Far otherwiſe. This pious effort, be aſſured, obtains an immediate reward, in that yearning of pure delight, which we cannot refuſe to claſs among the moſt exalted feelings of humanity.

It is impoſſible in this place to enumerate every inſtance in which the feelings of true religion exalt the ſoul almoſt above herſelf: in acts of ſecret and even painful obedience, in ſelf-denials, in exertions of pure benevolence, in every private exerciſe of duty in which the applauſe of man cannot be ſought, the appeal *to Him who ſeeth in ſecret*, is, and ought to be made, with joy, and inward triumph; with a ſublime feeling of duty, and a conſciouſneſs of divine ſuperintendence.—But waving the abundance of matter which thus preſents itſelf, let us, as more eſpecially ſuited to our preſent cauſe of meeting, conſider the ſubject of adoration. From this holy act, it will not, I think, be denied, that the heart which

which ſtandeth right is capable of feeling all that human nature can feel of fervour and ſublime effect. When we kneel in private, we feel ourſelves beneath the eye and in the actual preſence of God; imagination tranſports us to the very footſtool of his throne, and unites us with thoſe more perfect creatures who adore him everlaſtingly. On the other hand, if we conſider the nature of public worſhip, we ſhall find in it ſomething which, though cold and luke-warm minds may paſs over as trivial and common, a mind impreſſed with ſtrong devotion will naturally conſider as auguſt! The aſſembling of multitudes for the purpoſe of ſupplicating or adoring, with one conſent, a Being ſo infinitely above them, ſtanding as it were in a ſtate of viſible intercourſe with heaven, preſents a grand and magnificent idea; and though on common occaſions but little may be felt, yet what the ſituation is capable of producing may be conceived, if we figure to ourſelves the effect which even the dulleſt mind would feel from the united hallelujahs of multitudes.

The Roman church, ever ſtudious of powerful effects, has contrived an occaſion on which the operation of this active principle of devotion

tion is actually ſeen to exert itſelf with wonderful effect. On a ſtated day, the imagined delegate of heaven, he "who ſitteth in the "temple of God and ſhows himſelf as God,"* comes forth in all his ſplendor, in the front of his principal church. His arrival is anxiouſly expected by thouſands and ten thouſands, who are eagerly aſſembled to receive, what he ſometimes has been too little qualified to give, his bleſſing. At his appearance, that prodigious aſſembly is ſilent as one man, he raiſes his hands with a geſture of ſolemnity, and pronouncing the benediction diſtinctly, ſpreads them out again, as if it were to diffuſe it among the croud. At the ſame inſtant the whole multitude fall upon their knees, and when the bleſſing has been pronounced, the air is rent by their acclamations. Whatever, as Proteſtants, we may think of this ceremony, it ſurely is ſublime; and this tranſcendent ſublimity is evidently derived, in no ſmall degree, from the pervading principle of devotion †.

If we would feel an impreſſion of this kind in the utmoſt purity of effect, we muſt turn

* 2 Theſſ. ii. 4.

† See Brydone's Travels in Italy, &c.

to

to the Revelation of St. John, where the adoration of immortal ſpirits, the number of which was ten thouſand times ten thouſand, and thouſands of thouſands, is deſcribed by the vivid pen of inſpiration. There, if we can figure to ourſelves the united Hoſanna of every creature which is in heaven and in earth, and under the earth, and in the ſea, and all that are in them, ſaying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was ſlain, "to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, "and ſtrength, and honour and glory" *— if we can imagine this, or any thing like this, and not feel much ſublimity of effect, I will confeſs that all which has been ſaid is vain.

One objection occurs to me, which I will by no means attempt to ſuppreſs. It is this, that in ſuch an account of the effects of devout feelings, we may ſeem to place religion too much under the dominion of imagination: thereby encouraging ſuperſtition, and diſheartening thoſe whoſe ſouls may be leſs alive than ſome are to emotions of this active nature.—In anſwer to this we may ſay, that though the abuſe of a thing be dangerous,

* Rev. v. 11, &c.

we are not therefore to relinquiſh its uſe. Imagination wandering at random, leads to infatuation and abſurdity; but imagination, guided by reaſon, ſeems the only principle within us by which we can be ſaved from languor and lukewarmneſs. He who could conceive nothing beyond the actual impreſſion of the ſenſes, would be little capable of being excited to fervent feeling on any kind of ſubject: for though the ſenſes begin the work, it is the ſoul alone that truly feels; and imagination is, as it were, the effort of the ſoul to riſe above mortality. Imagination, as well as reaſon, is implanted in us by the divine Creator, and, doubtleſs, with as wiſe a deſign; the one as well as the other is frequently appealed to in ſcripture.

It is true that the frailty of human nature cannot always ſupport itſelf in great elevation, cannot always glow with rapturous agitation; the moſt conſiderable part of life, whatever occaſional fervour our feelings may excite, muſt be ſuffered to glide away along the even line of common occurrences, and in the calm tenor of ordinary ſenſations. It will be at particular times only, and in the exerciſe of particular energies, ſuch as have been

ſpecified,

ſpecified, that the good man, that even the beſt of men, can enjoy theſe higher tranſports of devotion: but if theſe be in their own nature delightful and ſublime, if they may recur ſufficiently often to enhance the general eſtimate of life, and if, in minds devoid of the religious principle, they cannot be excited at all, it muſt appear, beyond a doubt, that religion improves the ſoul, and exalts it above the common condition of humanity.

Let us then, as the prophet exhorts, "Lift "up our heart, with our hands unto God in "the heavens." An exhortation on which I will not now expatiate further, nor weaken the impreſſion already made by perſuaſions to cultivate and encourage theſe devout feelings, which would be either vain or ſuperfluous. Vain, if nothing of what has been ſaid has been felt by thoſe who heard it; or, if it has produced its due effect, ſuperfluous. If I have convinced, I have thereby exhorted; if I have ſhown what is truly moſt great, exalted, and ſublime, I have marked out the juſt object of ambition, and the attainment to which, for our own ſakes, our wiſhes ought moſt earneſtly to tend. To go beyond this, and add unneceſſary arguments to

prove that acknowledged good demands attention, and acknowledged happineſs deſerves purſuit, would ſurely be leſs uſeful, than to leave the impreſſion already made upon the mind, glowing in the ſimple but ardent colouring of truth.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD.

PSAL. CXXX. 4.

For there is mercy with thee, therefore ſhalt thou be feared.——(LITURGY.)

THOUGH the image of God impreſſed on man at his creation, has been, ſince the firſt tranſgreſſion, disfigured, and miſerably defaced, yet does he retain, even in this degraded ſtate, ſome traces of his priſtine dignity, ſome remains of his original powers. This dignity of man in nothing appears more conſpicuouſly, than in the privilege which he poſſeſſes of raiſing his thoughts to God, and contemplating, however imperfectly, that infinite Majeſty, by which the univerſe is filled. That a creature whoſe footſteps are chained, in a manner, to this groſs and ſenſeleſs ſoil, of which alſo in part he is formed,

ſhould be capable of aſcending, by the ſteps of reaſon, or on the wings of imagination, to the Holy of Holies; or, to ſpeak without a figure, ſhould be able to conſider the attributes, and inveſtigate, in any degree, the nature of God, is a privilege ſo extraordinary, that there belongs not to us any faculty of equal eminence, any property of comparable glory: and a heavy proof it is of a groveling, a diſgraced, and brutiſh diſpoſition, when men are averſe to ſuch exalted ſpeculations, and turn from them as inſipid or diſguſting.

As God, the Creator of us, and all things that have being, is conſequently the ſole fountain of all duty, it is moſt eſſential to our conduct throughout life, that we ſhould entertain right notions of him; adequate notions we cannot either obtain, or receive, but thoſe which we are able to acquire may be in their kind correct or incorrect, and the conſequences of each are too many and too important to allow of any negligence in the ſelection. On what God is, depends altogether what we muſt try to render ourſelves; if he be good and holy, goodneſs and holineſs are neceſſarily the higheſt objects of purſuit

purſuit to us. If he abhor iniquity, there is nothing which with more vigilance we ſhould be attentive to avoid.

This however is an eaſy queſtion. Since the differences between good and evil have been diſcernible by human faculties, there have been few, if any, men preſumptuous enough to deny, that good is ſuitable, and evil abhorrent to the nature of the *ſupreme Being*. The attribute of *goodneſs* is the firſt and the moſt evident that our reaſon diſcovers in its divine Author. The attributes of *juſtice* and of *mercy*, deducible from that, are much leſs eaſily comprehended, and yet have a reference, ſtill more immediate, to our conduct of ourſelves. They have even been thought irreconcileable to each other; doubtleſs, becauſe imperfectly underſtood. But this at leaſt is undeniable, that on the real nature of theſe attributes, whether we are able to diſcover it or not, depends every thing of the moſt importance which we poſſibly can hope or fear. Let us then make the *mercy* of God (the reconcilement of which with his juſtice will be found an inſeparable part of the enquiry) the ſubject of our preſent contemplations.

In the words of my text there is an apparent oppoſition, which leads, however, directly to the explanation of the whole ſubject—"There is mercy with thee, therefore ſhalt "thou be feared*:" which I have choſen to take from the earlier verſion inſerted in the Liturgy, rather than from that in the bible tranſlation, as making in itſelf a more congruous ſenſe, and certainly as more adapted to my purpoſe; which is to ſhow, that the neceſſity for that juſtice, on account of which God is to be feared, ariſes actually out of his attribute of mercy; that is, his particular juſtice out of his univerſal mercy, as I ſhall preſently more fully explain.

Among men left ſolely to the exertion of their own faculties for inſtruction on theſe ſubjects, the moſt current perſuaſion in ancient times comprehended merely a general notion of reward to be aſſigned to the good, and puniſhment to the bad; without any attempt to refine or ſpeculate upon the propriety of ſuch diſtributive juſtice, beyond the ſimple and obvious concluſions of natural reaſon;

* Or, as it ſtands in the later tranſlation, inſerted in our Bibles, "There is forgiveneſs with thee, that thou "mayeſt be feared."

that

that God muſt love good and hate evil, and conſequently would reward the one and puniſh the other. How this general doctrine was made palatable to the vulgar by groſs fictions of particular and ſpecific modes of puniſhing and rewarding, belongs not to our preſent ſubject. It is enough that the heathen world in general expected a ſtate of retribution, in which men ſhould be diſpoſed of finally according to their reſpective merits.

When curious and thinking men began to enquire and reaſon on thoſe ſubjects metaphyſically, they found mercy ſo lovely an attribute of Godhead, that, extending it too far, they ſwallowed up juſtice in it: and eſtabliſhing it as a principle, that "the "Deity could neither be angry, nor inflict "any kind of evil *," ſubverted in their own minds all notions of future retribution for offences. This maxim, as dangerous to ſociety, was not indeed circulated freely among mankind, but was avowed, among themſelves, by moſt philoſophers.

To prevent the general adoption of an error ſo inconſiſtent with the ſafety of man-

* Cic. de Off. iii. 28.—See Warburton, Div. Leg. B. iii. §. 4. p. 391.

kind,

kind, and ſo ſubverſive, in truth, of the very foundations of moral and religious obligation, was worthy, if any thing in this world could be ſo, of Divine interference. Accordingly in the ſacred oracles, of which the Jewiſh people were made the depoſitaries, the juſtice and the mercy of God are aſſerted together: "Though he cauſe grief," ſays Jeremiah, "yet will he have compaſſion according to "the multitude of his mercies: for he doth "not afflict willingly, nor grieve the chil-"dren of men *." And though it is declared that he is "long-ſuffering, full of "compaſſion, ſlow to anger, not willing that "any ſhould periſh †;" yet is it denounced no leſs expreſsly, that "he will reward the "doer of evil according to his wickedneſs ‡;" that "he will heap miſchiefs upon them, "will ſpend his arrows upon them, and vex "them with all adverſity §." Theſe declarations are yet more fully and plainly expreſſed in the ſcriptures of the New Teſtament; and with a reference more exactly pointed to a future ſtate of being. It is there indeed unequivocally aſſerted, that for the unrepenting

* Lam. iii. 32, 33.
† Pſal. lxxxvi. 15.
‡ 2 Sam. iii. 39.
§ Deut. xxxi. 29.

ſinner

ſinner grievous ſufferings are appointed in the world to come. How then ſhall theſe things be reconciled? how is it conſiſtent with the nature of him who is infinite in mercy to puniſh the tranſgreſſions of frail and imperfect creatures?

Though the word *vengeance* be frequently employed in ſcripture to expreſs the divine retributions for ſin, it is, like many other terms there uſed, admitted in accommodation to the groſs and general conceptions of mankind; to impreſs the mind, and to deter from tranſgreſſion. It never was imagined, I conceive, by any pious and enlightened reader of thoſe holy books, that theſe paſſages were literally to be underſtood, as if the all-perfect Judge were capable of feeling any thing at all ſimilar, or analogous to our mean and wicked paſſion of revenge; or that the returning of evil for evil could poſſibly be a principle of action in ſuch an agent. We ſay of human laws that they *take vengeance for tranſgreſſions*, in the very ſame ſenſe as we ſay it of the Almighty, becauſe they perform that to which vengeance tends, they inflict puniſhment; though we know that the laws, being inanimate, are as incapable of all kinds of feeling and affection, as

God

God is of all diſpoſitions that are not perfectly and conſummately good.

There are but two pure motives from which the infliction of puniſhment can proceed; the deſire of reforming the offender, and that of preſerving others from the danger or contagion of tranſgreſſion. Now, if we rightly interpret the ſcriptures which treat of theſe points, one of theſe motives, *the reformation of the offender*, can have no place in the puniſhments decreed to ſinners in another life. For it ſeems to be very clearly declared, that there remains after death no opportunity for expiation or amendment; ſuch as a man dies, ſuch will he appear at the judgment-ſeat of God, and according to the works done in this life, and not to any other, will he receive his ſubſequent deſtination.—That this is the caſe with Chriſtians, at leaſt, is very certain; though there are texts which ſeem to leave a latitude to thoſe who never had the truth propounded to them in this life *. If this be ſo, the re-

* 1 Pet. iii. 19. According to the interpretation of the fathers, &c. Chriſt deſcended into Hell, or Hades, to preach to the departed ſouls there, that they might repent: but ſee Pearſon on the article "He deſcended into "Hell" in the Creed.

formation

formation of the offenders cannot be the purpoſe of the puniſhments to be inflicted in another world. It remains then that they who are there puniſhed muſt ſuffer for the ſake of others, who either by their example may be deterred from offending the majeſty of God, or by their ſuffering may be ſecured in that happineſs which the impunity and freedom of bad ſpirits might perhaps be able effectually to interrupt.

We can judge of nothing ſo ſecurely as by arguments drawn from our experience. Let us apply them to this caſe; and we ſhall find, by a ſingle moment's reflection, that, in things which we are better able to comprehend, juſtice is not only compatible with mercy, but is even a part of it. It would not be a virtuous lenity, however amiable it might appear to a ſuperficial obſerver, but a weak and ſenſeleſs pity, which, by ſparing one offender, ſhould endanger the morals or ſecurity of innumerable unoffending perſons. It is injuſtice and cruelty, however ſpeciouſly it may be varniſhed over, to ſuffer thoſe to corrupt and harraſs others, who, by undergoing what they have deſerved, may be compelled to render an eſſential, though an unwilling, ſer-

vice to ſociety. On this principle do our laws proceed, which certainly in this place, and indeed in any place where they are rightly underſtood, it cannot be neceſſary to defend. It is indeed the principle of all juſt penal law whatſoever.

To apply this reaſoning to the puniſhment of ſinners denounced by the Goſpel, we muſt ſuffer our ideas to take a wider range than we are wont to give them. In matters infinitely leſs ſublime than the doctrines of religion, we find that right intelligence can be drawn only from great and comprehenſive views. The principles of the divine law muſt be as extenſive as the univerſe which is the ſphere of their application. We cannot poſſibly have right ideas of the government of God, or indeed of any of the great features of revealed religion, if we keep our minds groveling and confined within ſo inconſiderable a part of the great Legiſlator's dominions, as this ſmall planet which we now inhabit. The glorious ſcene of the incarnation, with all its wonderful conſequences, appears not in any degree comprehenſible, if we confine its reference to this inconſiderable ſpot on which it was tranſacted. To exalt

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our ſouls to conceptions more noble, and more juſt, the veil of the inviſible world has been drawn aſide by the ſcriptures. There do our eyes, ſtrengthened by faith, diſcover whole orders and hierarchies of ſpiritual beings, all concerned and intereſted in thoſe miraculous tranſactions which took place among us; and we diſcern a part of that connection by which, as it ſeems, the whole intellectual ſyſtem is knit together. The vindication of eternal juſtice, and its reconcilement with infinite mercy, was not a buſineſs to be tranſacted in ſecret, or in obſcurity, but was that into which every moral agent in the univerſe had an intereſt to enquire.

In the caſe which we now examine, the puniſhment of ſinners after death can have, as we have obſerved already, no tendency to their amendment, ſince before that period their whole probation muſt have been completed. Nor can it be neceſſary for the ſake of other men yet living, or to live, within this world, ſince the dead are removed from us, and can neither hurt us by their vices, nor warn us by their ſufferings, of which we are entirely ignorant: and the more ſo, becauſe, if we underſtand the ſcriptures aright, the

the whole exiſtence of this world will have paſſed away before thoſe ſufferings ſhall commence, ſince there is to be one great day for the judgment of all mankind. It remains then that their puniſhment, as it cannot be inflicted for mere vengeance-ſake, muſt be brought upon them for the ſake of thoſe who *can* be benefited by it; for the warning of moral agents ſtill capable of tranſgreſſing, and of falling into miſery by tranſgreſſion, which we know may happen even to the angels themſelves. For the warning and inſtruction of ſuch beings, of whatever rank or denomination they may be, muſt theſe inflictions happen; whoſe ſituation and faculties muſt of courſe be ſuch, that they will ſee and know their juſtice and their uſe. Thus have we an adequate and ſufficient cauſe for that retribution for guilt which religion teaches us to expect; and a very cogent reaſon why it ſhould not lightly, and upon mere compaſſion, be remitted: thus do we ſee why it is that becauſe God hath mercy, therefore he muſt be juſt, and the object of fear to thoſe who offend againſt that juſtice. This, it is true, is not revealed, but if it be fairly deducible by reaſon, as it ſeems to be, from

that

that which is revealed, and if it clear away ſome of the greateſt difficulties attending on religious ſpeculations, why ſhould we heſitate to admit it among our approved and probable opinions? To what end are we informed of the exiſtence and agency of other intellectual beings, if we are not to conſider them as connected with us in the divine government of the univerſe?

By this idea we are enabled to perceive the exact analogy which ſubſiſts between the adminiſtration of divine government, and that ſyſtem of things, which, doubtleſs, for our inſtruction, God has permitted to take place among curſelves. For as it would be cruelty and injuſtice to allow impunity in human ſociety to crimes pernicious in example, and in operation deſtructive, and to favour offenders at the expence of the innocent and well-deſerving; ſo is it inconſiſtent with the purity of God's nature, and even with his mercy itſelf, that, by forgiving our treſpaſſes, without atonement made, or reparation offered, he ſhould lead into temptation and into evil all thoſe beings, whatever may be their number, who by their faculties and ſituation are enabled to behold the events in

which we are engaged, and principally concerned. The number of tranſgreſſors here, it is true, is great; but if we conſider how we live ſurrounded by worlds which we can ſee, and, doubtleſs, by many more of which we have no knowledge; if we recollect that every region of ſpace is peopled, probably, by fit inhabitants, we may eaſily conceive that the number of thoſe delinquents here, however highly eſtimated, can bear no kind of proportion to the number of ſuch beings, as, by the example of their puniſhment, may be ſecured in innocence and everlaſting bliſs.—We cannot, perhaps, prove this to be ſo; but if it be reaſonable, if it be probable, if it be even poſſible, that it ſhould be true, we are furniſhed with a ſufficient anſwer to thoſe who are daring enough to argue againſt the ſyſtem of revealed religion, as in theſe points inexplicable and abſurd. What can be reaſonably explained in any way is not abſurd, though the mode of explanation adopted may not happen to be right.

We ſee then the fate of that reaſoning which ſuppoſes it inconſiſtent with the mercy of God to puniſh.—An error which the Gentile philoſophers in general are ſaid to have embraced;

braced; and which has not been unfaſhionable even in our own days: an error, pardonable indeed in thoſe who had only the light of nature to conduct them in the ſearch of truth, but devoid of reaſonable excuſe in thoſe to whom eternal truth hath openly vouchſafed to ſpeak; who have only to wiſh ſincerely to diſcover what is right, in order to be enabled to diſcern it. There are writings current among us, and falſely called philoſophical, in which the benevolence of God is affectedly extolled, and the frailty of man diſhoneſtly exaggerated, for no other purpoſe but to lead us to the dangerous concluſion, that, as far as the divine interference is concerned, every ſpecies of enormity may be committed with entire impunity. How conſiſtent the publication of this doctrine is with that philanthropy of which theſe teachers aſſume the pretence, let the philoſophers of Greece declare, who, though they held a ſimilar opinion, thought it not right to divulge or circulate it at large among the people, in whoſe eyes they always wore the appearance of aſſenting to the popular religion, leſt by removing the ſtrongeſt reſtraint upon the paſſions, for which they could propoſe

no ſubſtitute, they ſhould leave the world a prey to violence, cruelty, and every ſpecies of miſery ariſing from general and unchecked depravity. The modern *benefactors of mankind*, on the contrary, have been willing to make the experiment, dangerous as it evidently is, and for the ſake of publiſhing what they call truth, without proving it to be ſo, have ventured to put into the hazard the deareſt intereſts of humanity.

All that *mercy* could do, conſiſtently with itſelf, and infinitely more than any creature could expect, was done by the redemption of the Goſpel; whereby the freeſt grace was offered to all thoſe who would accept it on ſuch terms as might not be pernicious to the general intereſts of morality, but might afford an univerſal example: and, leſt this grace ſhould be abuſed, and a pretence be made that the more was pardoned the more the mercy of God would be multiplied, an antidote to this poiſon is provided in the inſpired reaſonings of the apoſtles, and particularly of St. Paul, who labours more abundantly than any other to prove, that, though the mercy of the Almighty is infinite, yet no ſecurity can thence be gained for the preſumptuous

ſumptuous tranſgreſſor. This Apoſtle having with his uſual energy propoſed the ſtriking queſtion, "Shall we then continue in ſin, that "grace may abound?" replies deciſively to himſelf, as reaſon ever muſt reply, being ſhocked at the very ſuggeſtion,—"God forbid!"—God forbid, indeed, ſuch preſumption, ſuch ingratitude, ſuch folly; that becauſe our heavenly Father has manifeſted a ſtrong deſire to ſave all thoſe whom it was poſſible to reclaim, we ſhould preſume to think that we are authorized to ſin, and to extend at our pleaſure the limits of his forbearance, forcing it to extend itſelf to any point that our unreaſonable paſſions may require. As it is a conſideration full of triumph, wonder, glory, and conſolation, that, to redeem us from puniſhment, without weakening the authority of holineſs and juſtice, and leading other beings into ſin, the eternal Son of God deſcended from on high, and ſuffered for us, bearing our infirmities, and healing us by his wounds; ſo is it a ſubject full of dread, and fitted to give us the moſt effectual warning againſt ſin, to reflect, that unleſs that bleſſed Son had deſcended and ſuffered, nothing, conſiſtently even with the mercy of God, could have done away the

guilt, or prevented the puniſhment of our offences.—It is an awful thing to think that when we commit a wilful crime, we cauſe an irregularity in the ſyſtem of things, which nothing but the interpoſition of ſo miraculous a Providence could ſet in order: we put a ſtain upon the works of the divine Creator, which nothing leſs than the blood of his Son could waſh away. Had not man offended, no atonement had been neceſſary; but had he offended, and been pardoned without an expiation, of the proper value of which God alone could judge, licence would have been given to all other moral agents to offend with impunity, and ſin would have remained triumphant in the univerſe.

Let us then bleſs God for his mercy, but in ſo doing, leſt we ſhould be tempted to preſume upon it, let us remember that his juſtice, inſtead of being oppoſed to it, is, in truth, an eſſential and inſeparable part of the ſame attribute; and that, according to my text, "as there is mercy with God, "therefore muſt he be feared."

Now to God, &c.

DIS-

DISCOURSE IV.

ON WHAT IS CALLED RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

1 COR. i. 20. part of.

Hath not God made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world?

THE queſtion ſeems extraordinary: and it is aſked, we may obſerve, as if intended to be very ſtrongly affirmed. It muſt in fact be affirmed, or the honour of God's own word will be impaired: for God hath ſaid expreſsly by his prophets; "The wiſdom of their wiſe men ſhall periſh, and "the underſtanding of their prudent men "ſhall be hid *." And again, "The "wiſe men are aſhamed, they are diſmayed and taken; lo, they have rejected "the word of the Lord, and what wiſdom "is in them †?" Theſe, and other paſſages

* Iſai. xxix. 14. † Jer. viii. 9.

of the ſame nature, ſhow that, in the mighty ſyſtem of redemption, to which the prophecies referred, there was intended to be ſomething ſo unlike the wiſdom of this world as to defeat its expectations, and confound its reaſonings.

This concluſion had been actually juſtified in the time of the apoſtle, as he himſelf informs us, by the coming of our Saviour; whoſe appearance in the fleſh, ſo very different from what human wiſdom looked for, and whoſe death upon the croſs, ſo contrary to all that reaſon might have concluded to be fit and proper, had expoſed the wiſdom of the world to be moſt juſtly branded with the name of folly. How could it be otherwiſe, when that which men deſpiſed and ſtumbled at, was ſhown to be in truth "the power of "God, and the wiſdom of God *?"

When wiſdom is ſo proudly vaunted as it is at preſent, and reaſon, as if recovered from this firſt defeat, preſents herſelf, and her admirers, as competent to judge, and form deciſions of irrefragable force on all things human and divine; at ſuch a time, it may be prudent to enquire concerning Revelation,

* 1 Cor. i. 24.

whether

whether this diſtinctive property of confounding human reaſon, be conſtantly inherent in it, or whether it was only once, and with a retroſpect to its paſt notions, that *God made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world.*

We have lately heard much ſaid within the chriſtian world, of a profeſſion which its admirers have denominated *rational Chriſtianity,* or, in other words, the ſyſtem of God's Revelation accommodated *to the wiſdom of this world,* and made entirely level to the reach of human Reaſon: which, if it be true that God has formed his Revelation altogether, ſo as to confound the vanity of man, in arguing and diſputing about heavenly things, muſt, it is very evident, be ſomething different from real Chriſtianity, and from the truth of that great ſyſtem which proceeded from Almighty Wiſdom.

Let us, however, before we proceed to the main queſtion, underſtand clearly what is meant by turning wiſdom into fooliſhneſs; and why God, who gave man ſuch an underſtanding as he has, ſhould be inclined thus to reduce it to confuſion and to ſhame. Human wiſdom is, it muſt be owned, the inſtrument that God himſelf has given us, to conduct

conduct us in our progreſs through this life; and it may be thought a little ſtrange, that he ſhould thus determine to expoſe its imperfections, and deprive it of our confidence.

To theſe previous queſtions the ſolutions are very obvious. Wiſdom becomes folly when it employs itſelf on objects far above its comprehenſion. All wiſdom muſt be eſtimated by compariſon, and that of an inferior being, however excellent within its proper ſphere, is folly when it is found in oppoſition to the wiſdom of one infinitely higher. God, therefore, turns the wiſdom of mankind to folly, when he diſplays his own in oppoſition to it, and thus detects its feebleneſs and imperfection. Why he ſhould do this is alſo clear; not to decry it altogether, or to diſcourage it from acting where the taſk is well proportioned to its powers, but to point out its proper ſphere, and there confine its energy and action. This, we muſt confeſs, is worthy of the wiſdom, and of the benevolence of God.

To diſcover whether the property of confounding human wiſdom in this manner, ſtill belongs to Revelation, let us conſider in what manner it had operated, at the time when it

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was firſt declared. "Howbeit," ſays St. Paul, "we ſpeak wiſdom among them that "are perfect: yet not the wiſdom of this "world, nor of the princes of this world, "that come to nought; but we ſpeak the "wiſdom of God in a myſtery, even the hid-"den wiſdom which God ordained before "the world unto our glory. Which none "of the princes of this world knew: for "had they known it, they would not have "crucified *the Lord of Glory* *." The matter then in which the wiſdom of this world was convicted principally of fooliſhneſs, was the ignorance of men concerning the great counſels of God, and their ſuppoſition that Jeſus was a mere man, who was in truth the *Lord of Glory*. In conſequence of which ſuppoſition, co-operating with their evil paſſions, they preſumed to crucify him. Surely then to that very point of folly and of wickedneſs have they fallen back, crucifying him afreſh, and putting him, as far as in them lies, to open ſhame, who maintain that he who then was crucified was mere man, and not the *Lord of Glory*.

* 1 Cor. ii. 6—8.

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In this point it is that the wiſdom of man is moſt inclined to expoſe its weakneſs. For, with a great opinion of its own ſagacity, it forms objections, and exclaims, how can it be that he who is the Lord of all, by whom all things were formed and ſtill ſubſiſt, the only-begotten of the Father, ſhould be veiled in human fleſh, and ſubject to the inſults and the tyranny of impious men?—While, on the other hand, the voice of God, regardleſs of theſe fooliſh doubts, declares aloud, "This "*is* my beloved Son, in whom I am well "pleaſed." Thus explicitly aſſerting that great truth which man is ſo unable to conceive.

In this manner has God evinced the vanity and imperfection of man's wiſdom, by preſenting to it a fact above its comprehenſion; concerning which, if it preſumes to reaſon, it is loſt in error, in abſurdity, and guilt. The only means by which this cenſure can be warded off are humble faith and acquieſcence: admitting the fact, becauſe the teſtimony for it properly demands aſſent, and, for the reaſons of it, truſting that they do exiſt, within that mind, in which all knowledge dwells devoid of imperfection.

There

There can be little doubt that God intended always to elude the fancied wiſdom of mankind, and compel it to be humble, by the myſterious darkneſs of his diſpenſations; for the prophecies upon that ſubject are general, and limited to no ſingle period of completion. God even deſcribes himſelf at large, as "the "Lord, that turneth wiſe men backward, "and maketh their knowledge fooliſh *." Nor has there any change ariſen in the nature of man, or of the ſacred diſpenſations, ſince St. Paul diſputed on this ſubject; ſince he aſked with ſo much energy, "Where is the "wiſe? where is the ſcribe? where is the "diſputer of this world? hath not God made "fooliſh the wiſdom of this world?"——In ſuch terms does the Lord declare that he eſtabliſhes a ſyſtem above man's comprehenſion, and yet we ſee men led away by the name of *rational Religion*; we hear of Chriſtianity deprived of every difficulty, and brought down within the graſp of reaſon. God ſaith rely on me, and hope through faith; but man preſumes to ſay, I will rely upon myſelf alone, and entertain no hopes but ſuch as I can clearly comprehend.—God ſaith, you cannot under-

* Iſai. xliv. 24.

ſtand

ſtand my ways; but man perſiſts in thinking he can fully trace them out. Theſe things, he ſays preſumptuouſly, may be; but this, and this, cannot; and what appears to me improbable muſt be, at all events, explained away.

The queſtion in my text, "Hath not God "made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world?" may be interpreted, hath not God preſented to mankind a ſyſtem which they cannot comprehend? Which leads directly to another of no leſs importance, why then will man torment himſelf to raiſe his underſtanding to it? or, what is worſe, why will he disfigure and corrupt the gift of God, to bring it downward to the ſtandard of his powers? It is the will of heaven to humble him, by giving him a view of things above his reach. But his pride refuſes to be humbled, and what it cannot comprehend, denies.

We are frequently miſled by words, and if we change our terms can better underſtand ourſelves. *Rational Chriſtianity*, if it were called *human Chriſtianity*, would not be ſo ſeductive in the ſound: and yet the term would be equivalent, for *rational* refers, of courſe, to *human reaſon* only. But rational, ſo uſed,

has a deception in it; for being commonly oppoſed to irrational, a concluſion is drawn tacitly, that the Chriſtianity to which that epithet is not applied, has in it ſomething contrary to reaſon, or inconſiſtent with it; and between *rational* and *irrational* belief no man of ſenſe would heſitate a moment. But the real oppoſition marked by ſuch a term, in this caſe, ſhould be that between *rational* and *ſuper-rational*, between *human* and *divine*. And in this oppoſition of terms, it would be equally the part not only of common ſenſe, but even of the higheſt underſtanding, to give the preference to that which muſt be beſt; and *human Chriſtianity*, however ſpeciouſly adorned, can be but ill regarded when compared with that which is *divine*.

Could Chriſtianity, retaining its eſſential properties, be made entirely level to the faculties of man, then to the triumphant queſtion and implied affirmation of the Apoſtle, when he ſays, "Hath not God made "fooliſh the wiſdom of this world?" we might boldly anſwer, No. God hath rather eſtabliſhed and exalted the wiſdom of this world, by ſhowing that there is nothing in the moſt important of his counſels, or the moſt

moſt obſcure of all his diſpenſations, that is not open to the ſearch, and ſubject to the judgment of mankind. That this is not the caſe we have abundant aſſurance throughout the apoſtolic writings.

It is, however, only the pretended wiſdom which aſpires to knowledge not within its reach, that God is willing to confound: when rightly exerciſed, the reaſon of mankind may riſe to real wiſdom, and is by its Divine Author encouraged and approved.

If we ſeek the limits of that human wiſdom which deſerves ſo honourable a title, they may, in a looſe and general way, be eaſily defined to be coincident with the extent of real knowledge that man is able to acquire. It is wiſe for him to reaſon upon ſubjects wherein he has the means of judging truly, and fooliſh for him to attempt to ſpeculate in thoſe wherein he has no certain grounds of knowledge to ſupport him. To define this matter more exactly, we muſt have recourſe to ſpeculations of more ſubtlety. It ſeems, however, that in the preſent ſtate of knowledge we may do it with ſufficient accuracy.

The progreſs of enquiries has, in latter times, diſcovered whence it is that all our knowledge is derived. We are born, it appears, without diſtinct ideas, which afterwards, by the medium of our ſenſes, are by ſlow degrees acquired, and ſtored for uſe. The mind, by its reflection on the treaſures thus collected, can improve and render them more uſeful, and by its inward conſciouſneſs of what itſelf performs, can gain ſome further ſteps. But nothing of original information can it poſſibly collect, by its own ſtrength, in any other way. Hence is it that, in all enquiries concerning any objects of our ſenſes, we muſt invariably proceed by the means of obſervation and experiment, accumulating facts, and, as we go, deducing what we can from our acquirements. In matters of an intellectual nature, the mind, examining its own proceedings, and thoſe it knows to be analogous to them, may alſo aſcertain ſome facts, and deduce ſome general principles. Beyond theſe boundaries we cannot gain, by our own powers, a ſingle ſtep with certainty. Of things which neither our ſenſes can deſcry, nor the internal ſurvey of ourſelves preſent, we can only form conjectures; of

facts we can know nothing but by information: And whence can information of that kind proceed? undoubtedly, from ſome ſuperior ſource. In divine knowledge, for example, whence can we be furniſhed with the truths we may require? certainly from divine communication only; experience and reflection can do nothing for us.

If upon ſuch ſubjects information has been actually beſtowed by God himſelf, there cannot be a doubt with what ſubmiſſion we ſhould all receive it: nor is there any doubt among mankind, ſo far as they agree concerning the main fact, that the information has been imparted, or in the interpretation of the words in which it is conveyed. But divine truths, being communicated to us in the common language of men, are ſubject to partake of that uncertainty which the imperfection of all human languages occaſions; namely, a difference of interpretation, by means of which they may convey to various men diſſimilar views of things, unleſs ſome certain rules can be laid down to aſcertain the proper method of interpreting.

We cannot, perhaps, by any means obtain ſuch limitations as will deliver us from all uncertainty:

uncertainty: one negative direction appears, however, ſufficiently obvious; That we cannot in ſuch ſubjects, as in thoſe which lie more level to our comprehenſion, reject the literal meaning on our own authority, and ſeek another as more probable, or ſuited better to our preconceived opinions; for our previous notions, by our own confeſſion, are drawn entirely from inferior objects; from what we ſee, or hear, or touch, or otherwiſe perceive upon this earth; or from what is paſſing in the intellectual part of our own compounded frame; in all which there is nothing that can by any means direct us rightly in divine ſcience; nothing that can guide us to a knowledge, juſt or accurate, of the counſels, and ſtill leſs of the peculiar mode of exiſtence of the Deity.

If, indeed, in different communications of divine knowledge there be found any ſeeming variation, it will then be the proper act of reaſon and of judgment to examine which of them is cleareſt in itſelf, and beſt confirmed by other ſacred oracles; and to conſider afterwards by what fair ſteps of ſound interpretation the whole may be reſtored to harmony; well knowing that, notwithſtanding appear-

ances, there cannot be a real inconſiſtency. Such latitude may fairly be aſſumed, and muſt, in caſes that require it, be allowed. But to determine, on the ground of human reaſon, that declarations, in themſelves diſtinct and clear, originating confeſſedly from divine authority, are, in their nature, ſuch as man cannot receive, and, in purſuance of that bold deciſion, to quit the plain and natural ſenſe of many correſponding paſſages, compelling them, by forced interpretation, to conform themſelves, not to other oracles of ſacred origin, but to that opinion which to the interpreter may ſeem more worthy of aſſent,—this is ſurely vain preſumption:—this is ſitting as in judgment againſt God, and raiſing up the wiſdom of this world above his heavenly wiſdom. Of human reaſon ſo employed the proper name is *folly*; its mightieſt efforts but the more expoſe its weakneſs; and the oracles of heaven, unſhaken by its vain aſſaults, bring back to our remembrance the ſtrong queſtion of my text, "Hath not God made fooliſh the wiſ-" dom of this world?"—or that of Jeremiah, who exclaims of men preſumptuous in their fancied knowledge, "Lo! they have rejected

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" the word of the Lord, and what wiſdom " is in them * ?"

It is delightful to the pride of man to fancy that his mind can vanquiſh every obſtacle, and lay all difficulties plain before it; but it was not to indulge that fooliſh pride that Jeſus Chriſt was manifeſted in the fleſh; rather was it, if we will be guided by St. Paul, " to caſt down *reaſonings* †, and every " high thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the " knowledge of God ‡."

The wiſdom of this world has ſcope enough to exerciſe its powers in many other ways, without exhauſting them in vain attempts againſt the oracles of God. Let it purſue the ſyſtem of created things, and with an honourable diligence trace out the power of God in all his various works; collecting facts; inventing, varying, and comparing curious trials and experiments, till nothing be unknown which ſuch enquiries can diſcover. Let it employ itſelf in viewing man in all the wondrous movements of his intellectual powers. Let it improve the arts by

* Jer. viii. 9.

† Marginal tranſlation. Text, *imaginations*. Greek, λογισμους. ‡ 2 Cor. x. 5.

which his natural powers are multiplied, and the value of his life increaſed. Let it form new ſyſtems of morality and government, taking care only to make the one conſiſtent with the light of true religion, and the other with the quiet and ſecurity of man. Let it do theſe things, and whatever elſe it can perform within its proper ſphere, and praiſe and honour will attend it to the utmoſt limits of that progreſs.

But when it comes to touch on ſacred knowledge, then let human wiſdom be aſſured, that nothing but humility can ſave it from the ſhame of being counted folly. What is plainly taught it muſt receive implicitly, without diſputings, cavillings, or ſubterfuges; well knowing that it has within itſelf no ſcale by which to try or eſtimate that wiſdom which deſcends from heaven. Thus cautioned, man will ever find the oracles of God a ſource of comfort and delight, united frequently with wonder: but if he will perſiſt to have them level in all matters to his knowledge, and ſquared exactly to his preconceived ideas, then will they prove to him but a ſource of ſhame; and however he may vaunt himſelf at preſent, and triumph in the

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pride of his diſcoveries, a day will come when he will feel, and all mankind will ſee, that God has turned his wiſdom into folly.

Rational religion oppoſed to *irrational* (that is, to ſuperſtition and the dreams of error and abſurdity), let us all maintain and value: but *rational* oppoſed to *divine*, let us leave to thoſe who can be vain enough to think that human reaſon is ſuperior to eternal wiſdom; or human ſpeculation preferable to divine inſtruction.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE V.

ON THE AGENCY OF SPIRITS.

1 PETER v. 8.

Be ſober, be vigilant; becauſe your adverſary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about ſeeking whom he may devour.

THE whole doctrine of ſpirits is derived from divine revelation. By our natural ſenſes we diſcern nothing but what has bodily ſubſtance; for though many accounts have been circulated in the world, of perſons ſuppoſed to have had intercourſe with ſpiritual beings, there appears not to be, in the whole maſs of ſuch narratives, ſufficient real teſtimony fully to ſubſtantiate that belief, were it to reſt upon no other authority. Every thing is conjecture concerning theſe beings, except what is delivered in the ſcriptures.

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It is, however, very natural that we ſhould form conjectures on this intereſting ſubject. As far as we can examine the works of God, we find ſtrong reaſon to believe that he has conſtructed them with a certain general analogy to each other; that is, with ſuch a reſemblance of one part to another, that what we obſerve in ſome caſes, we may conclude to take place in others alſo, to which our actual obſervation cannot reach. Now as throughout that part of creation to which our knowledge extends, we perceive a regular gradation of beings downwards from ourſelves: and as we are conſcious that the rank in which we ſtand is far below the limits of imaginable perfection, even among created beings; it muſt appear to us a ſuppoſition highly probable, that there is alſo a ſcale of gradation extending upwards from us towards thoſe perfections which are incommunicable. Our conjectures will not reſt here. Having deemed it probable that there ſhould be creatures better than ourſelves, we are tempted to conſider alſo of what kind they may be, and to what they may have moſt reſemblance. Our ideas here are drawn from ourſelves. Examining

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our own nature, and finding, by many irrefragable proofs, that we conſiſt of two parts, namely, of a bodily ſubſtance, to which our ſenſes all give evidence; and of ſomething more ſubtile and excellent, which we trace in the operations of thought, and the powers of memory, reflection, judgment, and imagination; we ſeparate theſe parts in our minds, and diligently compare them. It becomes immediately evident that the bodily part is very inferior to the other; which, for the ſake of having a name, we call *ſpiritual*, without even pretending to know in what ſpirituality conſiſts. We ſee, as we deſcend in the ſcale of exiſtence, leſs and leſs evidence of mind or ſpirit, till at laſt we come to mere bodies deſtitute of all ſpiritual being; of all internal, actuating power.—It is natural to conclude, from this obſervation, that ſpirit, whatever it be, is the general principle of activity, and that body always partakes of the groſſneſs and imperfection which evidently marks it, when wholly deſtitute of mind. On theſe ſuggeſtions, therefore, we form by analogy our aſcending ſcale of beings: we ſuppoſe leſs body and more ſpirit; or, to leap at once to the extent of

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our notion thus obtained, we ſuppoſe mere ſpirits, diveſted entirely of the chains and groſſneſs of body; all activity and all intelligence.

For all this, however, we ſhould have perhaps no real teſtimony, without the aid of revelation. Whatever ſtrength of probability reaſon might aſſign to this opinion, and very conſiderable ſtrength it muſt infallibly aſcribe, ſtill it would be only conjecture. No man would be able to pronounce that ſo it is, though many might reaſonably be diſpoſed to that belief.

From the ſcriptures we learn expreſsly, that ſuch conjectures are not only rational, but true; and that there are indeed orders of beings above us, as there are below.—How exact the gradation may be, is no where told; but that there do exiſt innumerable multitudes of ſpiritual creatures,—of this we have direct aſſurance. We learn alſo, from the ſame infallible authority, that the analogy extends yet further than we might perhaps have ever traced it by conjecture.—For it appears that even the higheſt orders of ſpirits have been ſubject, like ourſelves, to trial; and liable to ſin: and that, in conſequence

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of a moral free agency miſapplied, ſome of them have actually fallen from their original ſtate of bliſs, have depraved themſelves, and become obnoxious to the wrath of God *; while others, who have better uſed their privileges, continue in unſullied excellence, the favoured miniſters of God, and attendants on his throne and glory.

Our previous notions of general analogy are ſtill further confirmed and extended by the particulars delivered concerning theſe ſpirits; of whom the good are repreſented as active in benevolence, as rejoicing in our good, and willing by all means to promote it: the bad, as we obſerve among bad men, maliciouſly inclined to extend the dominion of evil, envious of good, which they are unable to partake, and deſirous to draw others into the ſame condemnation under which they lie. For this reaſon it is that they are called our ſpiritual enemies, and the chief and moſt malignant of them, by way of eminence, *the adverſary*; with a view to whoſe unceaſing earneſtneſs to draw us down to ſin and to perdition, it is ſaid emphatically in my text, that "our adverſary the devil,

* Jude 6.

"as

" as a roaring lion, walketh about ſeeking " whom he may devour."

But, though ſo much has been revealed concerning the exiſtence and diſpoſitions of ſpirits, there ſtill is much that remains involved in obſcurity; concerning which, as in the caſe of every thing above our natural faculties to diſcern, it is neceſſary to maintain a modeſt reſerve; and whatever we may gueſs or fancy probable, to pronounce nothing as certain, that is not authorized by the teſtimony of ſcripture. We are ignorant, for example, of the mode of communication by which ſpiritual beings can operate upon our minds. That there ſhould be ſome mode of intercourſe between ſpirits, even of different claſſes and orders, independent of corporeal organs, of which ſome of them are ſuppoſed to be diveſted, is what we cannot heſitate to pronounce moſt probable; that there is ſuch intercourſe the ſacred writings declare; but in what manner it is carried on, we are wholly uninformed. In what manner the Holy Spirit of God acts upon our ſpiritual nature, ſo as to aſſiſt in virtuous efforts, or promote good diſpoſitions; and in what manner the evil ſpirits, which are our adver-

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ſaries, ſuggeſt temptations, and endeavour to lead us into evil, we are equally ignorant; and it might be dangerous to attempt deciding any thing too raſhly on the ſubject. It has been actually found dangerous; and has operated to the encouragement of deſtructive ſuperſtitions on the one hand, and on the other; when men, giving way to the ſuggeſtions of heated or of gloomy imagination, have fancied that they could perceive in themſelves, either the manifeſt acceſſions and influx of the Holy Spirit, or the invincible inherence of the evil one.

But, though we can know nothing poſitively on this obſcure and difficult ſubject; though we know not even how the ſpirit of a man, which is within him, performs its functions to direct his bodily powers; yet there is one point of *negative* knowledge to which it is very neceſſary for us to attend;—we may know what to deny, though we know not what to aſſert.

It is then undoubtedly evident, from the whole teſtimony of ſcripture, that the agency of ſpirits, good or bad, and their intercourſe with our ſpirits, whatever may be its nature, is *not* ſuch as can by any means deſtroy the freedom

freedom of our actions: and though it may be ſaid on ſome occaſions, with great propriety, that evil ſpirits tempt and inſtigate, yet can theſe ſuggeſtions by no means be pleaded in excuſe for any offence committed. —"The devil tempted me, and I did eat," is recorded as the excuſe alledged for the firſt tranſgreſſion in the world; nevertheleſs, it appears that the offender was puniſhed, as a being perfectly at liberty to have reſiſted that evil, as well as to have yielded to it.— "Why," ſaid St. Paul to Ananias, "hath "*Satan* filled thine heart, to lie to the Holy "Ghoſt?"—a queſtion which, as it was followed by immediate puniſhment, proves that Ananias might and ought to have prevented that evil operation of Satan on his heart.

From all that we can collect to throw light upon this point, it appears to be chiefly upon our bad paſſions that evil ſpirits are empowered to work. Theſe materials muſt firſt be found within our minds, before thoſe enemies can gain an influence by which they can direct or injure us: or, if we ſhould allow, from certain paſſages of ſcripture, that they may be able firſt to inſtil bad diſpoſitions,

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and then to act upon them; ſtill it will remain undeniable that we have a free power to reject, and ſufficient ſtrength to reſiſt, the approach of ſuch pollutions; and that it muſt be owing only to our negligence and ſloth that bad ſeeds can be ſown by theſe bold enemies. We are commanded expreſsly, and a wiſe command implies the power of obeying, "not to give place to the devil *;" nay, we are aſſured yet further, that on reſiſtance he *will fly from us* †.

My text ſtates fully to us both the danger, and the mode of prevention: the fury of the adverſary, and the means of preſervation. "He walketh about," we are told, "as a "roaring lion, ſeeking whom he may de-"vour."—But, as a full ſecurity againſt him, we have two ſhort precepts given in charge: "Be ſober; be vigilant."—Nor can we fail to conclude, from the ſtyle of the injunction, that whatever be the nature of this danger, we ſhall find in the *ſobriety* and *vigilance* recommended to us, a full and perfect defence; for if theſe were not ſufficient, other means would ſurely have been pointed out.—To awaken our vigilance, therefore,

* Eph. iv. 27. † James iv. 7.

and not to overwhelm us with vain fears, we are thus informed of the terrors of the adverſary. We have warning given, "that "we wreſtle not againſt fleſh and blood, "but againſt principalities, againſt powers, "againſt the rulers of the darkneſs of this "world, againſt ſpiritual wickedneſs in high "places *:"—but at the ſame time we are told what is the armour of God, in which a Chriſtian ſhould keep watch, and in which he cannot fail to be victorious.

Sobriety and *vigilance* contain the eſſence, and brief abſtract of our duty on this ſubject: underſtanding by *ſobriety*, the general command of all our paſſions; and by *vigilance*, the conſtant, neceſſary care to prevent all danger of ſurpriſe, aſſiſted by thoſe general means of preſervation which our holy religion affords. We are to be *ſober*, as becomes thoſe who watch; and we are to keep our watch, ſecured by the ſacred panoply (or whole armour) of God.

Mankind, at preſent, with that violent tendency to extremes which is obſervable in moſt of their proceedings and opinions, have gone from the extravagant credulity of be-

* Eph. vi. 12.

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lieving every idle fable of preternatural interference, to an unwillingneſs, little leſs unreaſonable, to admit of any agency beyond the ordinary powers of nature, as ſubmitted to our ſenſes and actual knowledge. It has become difficult even to mention the operations of ſpiritual beings, without giving offence to ſome, who, in many reſpects, are willing hearers of the truths of revelation: and it may ſerve, at leaſt, as an illuſtration of the fluctuation, and, conſequently, of the fallibility of human judgment; that the points wherein the greateſt difficulties now are found, are thoſe concerning which no ſhadow of ſuſpicion had ariſen for ages.

But what ſhall we ſay?—The doctrine of ſpirits, good and bad, what is it, in its firſt outlines, but an exact confirmation of that which, from the analogy of nature, our ſoundeſt reaſon teaches us to expect? In its utmoſt detail, what is it but a perfectly conſiſtent extenſion of the ſame analogies; and a proof that the government of God is, in all its parts, coherent?—If there be any ſpiritual beings, it is moſt natural to ſuppoſe that their activity will be proportioned to

their other perfections: that their intelligence will pervade the works of God with much more eaſe than we employ our outward ſenſes (ſince we know, from what is ſpiritual in ourſelves, how much more rapidly it acts than any other power): and that they will take a zealous intereſt in ſuch things, throughout the univerſe, as are congenial to their own inherent diſpoſitions.—Conceive, among ſuch beings, any fallen into depravity of will and moral character, and you have immediately, by combining this with their other diſcoverable properties, the very evil demons of the holy ſcriptures; ſubtle, active promoters of evil, by all means ſuited to their powers, and enemies of the moſt formidable kind to creatures of a mixed, and, in ſome reſpects, an inferior, nature, whoſe happineſs is made to depend on goodneſs only.

I feel no ſcruple to affirm that this doctrine, ſurely not unreaſonable, being once admitted, removes the greateſt difficulties from the ſyſtem of our holy religion. For when once, inſtead of conſidering man ſimply as he appears to our ſenſes and actual knowledge, a being of ſome excellence, placed among inferior creatures, totally incapable of judging

judging concerning his moral properties, or any of their conſequences; we regard him as in ſome part ſpiritual himſelf, and connected with ſpiritual beings innumerable, the whole nature of his ſituation is changed. When we place him in a theatre in which all ſpirits, good and bad, are ſpectators of his conduct; judges of its moral merit or demerit, of its reference to the general happineſs of his ſpecies, and to the unalterable decrees of God: when we conceive the good among theſe hoſts of ſpirits intereſted to ſee the wiſdom, juſtice and mercy of God entirely juſtified, and his glory extended; and the bad in league together, uſing all their art to corrupt, pervert, and extend the dominion of evil; when we conceive all this, and whatever elſe the mind can comprehend as rationally connected with it, we no longer find it difficult to believe that for a creature ſo ſituated, whoſe actions are ſo obſerved, and whoſe good or evil conduct draws with it ſuch extenſive conſequences, the Majeſty of heaven itſelf ſhould interfere. We ſee that it may have been worthy of divine wiſdom to form, in ſuch a caſe, a ſyſtem of redemption, not only infinite in mercy to mankind, but full of

endleſs wonder and admiration to the hierarchies of bleſſed ſpirits; and pregnant with no leſs confuſion to thoſe who are rebellious and incorrigibly wicked *.

I do not ſay that this repreſentation removes all wonder from our faith; on the contrary I have juſt ſaid, that there are circumſtances in it, at which the moſt perfect of created beings muſt for ever feel aſtoniſhment: but I ſay that it ſo far opens to us the ſubject, as to make us ſenſible of ſome proportion between the great act of redemption and the purpoſes for which it was intended: that it removes ſo much of difficulty as ariſes from the apparent want of conſequence in man to employ ſuch mighty plans in heaven for his ſalvation.

However, after all our reaſonings, the concluſion of the whole is this: whether we can conceive it or not, whether we can ſee the probabilities or not that have now been repreſented, concerning the exiſtence and the nature of ſpiritual beings, the ſcripture poſitively aſſerts that they do exiſt, and that there are among them buſy, artful, and very

* This topic has been more fully handled in a former diſcourſe.

formidable

formidable enemies to our ſalvation: and this, without relinquiſhing our chriſtian faith, we cannot poſſibly deny or doubt.

We ſee among mankind a wonderful propenſity to evil; we ſee that ſin, when once admitted, has a tendency to increaſe beyond what we can readily eſtimate; and, in very many inſtances, to a degree of depravity which we cannot at all underſtand, but which we call infatuation; where the love of evil ſeems to continue in full force when every motive is removed. Of theſe ſtrange things the ſcriptural account is, that certain evil beings, taking advantage of our tendency to depravity, and aſſiſted by the ſubtilty of their own nature, delight to plunge us, ſtep by ſtep, continually more deep in wickedneſs, till we become moſt like themſelves, and at all times the ready inſtruments of their iniquity.—Can we give a better account?—I doubt; nay, I deny it.

As a remedy for all this evil interference, Chriſtianity offers to us the aſſiſtance of the *bleſſed* Spirit of God!—On the intercourſe of other good ſpirits with us, and the aid they may communicate, little ſtreſs is laid, becauſe

this alone is all-ſufficient: nor can there be the ſmalleſt fear, that where the Holy Spirit has taken poſſeſſion, the malignant demons will preſume to make intruſion. Powerful, therefore, as our ſpiritual adverſaries may be, we have alſo the moſt ſufficient means to counteract them. The fervent prayer which a ſincere conſcience ſhall dictate in any hour of danger will infallibly put to flight the enemy, and gain the aid required. We have reaſon, therefore, from this doctrine, to ſtand upon our guard: but we have not reaſon either to deſpond, or to allege that we are ever drawn to evil irreſiſtibly. The power of evil cannot have its hold upon us but by our own remiſſneſs, or our fault: and however our great adverſary may roar and rage againſt us, we are furniſhed with a complete defence againſt his utmoſt ſtrength in the ſhort command of the apoſtle, "Be ſober, "be vigilant."

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE VI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION.

HEBREWS xii. 25.

See that ye refuſe not him that ſpeaketh: for if they eſcaped not who refuſed him that ſpake on earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven.

BY an auguſt and magnificent aſſemblage of images drawn from the hiſtory of the Moſaic revelation, the Apoſtle in this chapter endeavours to impreſs his diſciples, of Jewiſh origin, with fit ideas of the dignity of the more recent word, and diſpenſation of God. He recalls to their minds the aſtoniſhing particulars recorded by their prophet, the mountain burning with fire, which it was death to touch; the black darkneſs and the tempeſt; the miraculous ſoundings of the trumpet of God; and, above all, that awful voice which

which they that heard, intreated that it ſhould not be ſpoken unto them any more, leſt they ſhould periſh. This ſo formidable an apparatus of ſplendor (ſuch is the tenor of his reaſoning;) this ſpecimen of the grandeur of Omnipotence; theſe circumſtances, which it agitates the very ſoul to conceive, attended the delivery of that firſt covenant, which was partial, which was imperfect, which was temporary. The revelation now delivered, he urges, is ſtill of higher import and ſolemnity. It proceeds not from an earthly mountain, but from *the Sion of God*, the heavenly Jeruſalem; the aſſiſtants at it, before whom ye ſtand, are the innumerable company of angels, the general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born which are written in heaven, the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, God himſelf the judge of all, and Chriſt Jeſus the mediator of the new covenant, by the ſprinkling of whoſe blood the covenant is ſanctified. —Thus, his argument implies, whatever were your previous conceptions of the importance of the firſt covenant, whatever the feelings which the circumſtances of its manifeſtation might excite, ye are come to that which is infinitely more auguſt!—and,

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in the words of my text, he infers the caution neceſſarily conſequent upon that conſideration. "*See that ye refuſe not him that* "*ſpeaketh:* for if they eſcaped not who re- "fuſed him who ſpake on earth, how much "more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away "from him that ſpeaketh from heaven." Finally he adds, with an implied reference to a prophecy well known by his countrymen to have reference to the coming of the Meſſiah, —"whoſe voice then ſhook the earth: but "now he hath promiſed ſaying, Yet once "more I ſhake, not the earth only, but alſo "heaven *."

I know not what can be conceived more impreſſively affecting to the imagination of man, than the idea of an addreſs to him from heaven. We are none of us, at leaſt in countries where the higher faculties of Reaſon have at all been exerciſed, devoid of ſome conception of God. This idea, imperfect as it muſt of neceſſity be in ſome reſpects, is made up of all that our minds can figure to themſelves moſt ſublime, and moſt tranſcendent. Of *Infinity*, and *Eternity*. Of *Wiſdom*, before which the utmoſt ſtretch of our capacity ſhrinks

* Hag. ii. 6.

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down to leſs than nothing: Of *perfect Holineſs*, before which the pureſt human conſcience cannot feel itſelf prepared to ſtand; of *Infinite Power*, which, as it called us out of nothing into being, may in a moment alſo blot us from our place in the creation.—Impreſſed with ſuch ideas, and ſuch only can we have, if we think of God reaſonably, what would be our feelings, what our terror, what our readineſs of obedience, could we hear his awful voice addreſſing us from Heaven, and commanding us to receive his Revelation?—Now, though our Ears may not perceive it, he hath ſpoken; though our Eyes may not diſcern the Splendor of his Majeſty, it is all employed in this great cauſe, and the Apoſtle has diligently endeavoured to diſplay and paint it to our minds, in the glowing colours of inſpired eloquence.

Knowing this, ſhall we not think it ſtrange that ſuch a Revelation, ſo ſupported, can poſſibly exiſt among us, and yet be by any perſons diſregarded? A Revelation which we have not indeed ourſelves heard delivered from heaven, for then it would be impoſſible to reſiſt: nor yet from any holy mountain, amidſt thunderings and terrific ſounds; but preſented

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to us in all the ſublime and ſimple Majeſty of Truth, by a divine perſon who came from heaven to give it; foretold by *Prophecies*; eſtabliſhed by *Miracles*; teſtified by the hand-writing of perſonal witneſſes; and ſealed by the blood and teſtimony of ſaints and martyrs.

Whatever might in the Apoſtle's time have been the neceſſity which led him thus to enforce the importance of the Goſpel Revelation: we are ſure that it is not now leſs cogent. Rather have we reaſon to apprehend, from the general tendency of things, a much more reluctant reception, minds leſs diſpoſed to feel the topics of religion, and more inclined to indifference towards thoſe things wherein it is ſinful to be indifferent. While the eye-witneſſes of our Saviour's miracles were living, themſelves alſo gifted by the Holy Ghoſt with preternatural powers, it could not be very difficult for men ſo qualified to perſuade their hearers, that the doctrine which originated from ſuch a maſter, and by ſuch diſciples was diſſeminated, muſt be of high, of infinite importance. In fact, ſo ſtrongly was this perſuaſion enforced, that it ſeems, during the firſt periods of Chriſtianity, even to have counteracted nature; leading men,

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in direct oppoſition to all their moſt prevalent propenſities, to an abſolute renunciation of worldly gratification, and to the contempt of actual ſufferings; inſpiring not only a few ſtrong and heroic minds, but even the boſoms of the weak, the tender, and the timid, with fortitude to reſiſt the extremities of pain, and the horrors of death approaching in its moſt terrific forms; and this without exception, in thouſands of each ſex, and of every age. The writings of pagan authors bear witneſs to the obſtinacy, as they conſidered it, of whole multitudes of Chriſtians, who when life was offered, upon terms apparently ſo eaſy, as that of mere external compliance with idolatrous ceremonies, courted deſtruction, and contended for the honour of dying in that cauſe. We well know, and are ready to allow, that violent oppoſition may inflame the minds of men, and increaſe their pertinacity; but we know alſo, that this can only happen, when they are previouſly perſuaded that their principles are right, and their cauſe important; and how can ſuch a perſuaſion be produced? Certainly not by the unſupported aſſertions of a few ignorant men, eſpecially in matters of fact.—The divine credentials of

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the Apoſtles produced this perſuaſion, and the recorded ſtrength of that perſuaſion acts in turn to ſatisfy our minds that ſuch credentials muſt have been exhibited. There was little of religious *indifference* in thoſe ages, except among thoſe who had neither ſeen nor heard of the wonderful tranſactions of the times: the reſt were ſoon divided into perſecutors and perſecuted, the ſincerely converted, and the obſtinately unbelieving.—Gallio, the proconſul of Achaia, is indeed repreſented as perfectly indifferent to the diſputes between the Jews and St. Paul, notwithſtanding his ſituation brought them ſo near to his obſervation; but it is evident from the hiſtory, that he was totally uninformed of their nature; for he ſaid to them, "If it were a matter of "wrong, or wicked lewdneſs, O ye Jews, "reaſon would that I ſhould bear with you; "but if it be a queſtion of words and names, "and your law, look ye to it, for I will be "no judge of ſuch things *." But it is undeniable that it was nothing ſuch; it was not a conteſt about words and names, or the punctilios of any law, but a queſtion of the higheſt import that could be brought

* Acts xviii. 14.

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before mankind, namely, concerning a Revelation of the will of God from heaven: but of this he was uninformed, and neglected to inform himſelf; for though the tumults in the ſynagogues continued, and increaſed, it is added, "that *Gallio* cared for none of "thoſe things."—But very different was the effect whenever any ſerious enquiry was made; as appears in the inſtance of Sergius Paulus, another proconſul, whoſe province was Cyprus: he ſent for Barnabas and Saul, and deſired to hear the word of God; and having been a witneſs of the judgment upon Elymas the Sorcerer, who in his preſence dared to withſtand the Apoſtles, "*he believed*, being "aſtoniſhed at the doctrine of the Lord *."

When the rage of perſecution had ſubſided, and the civilized world had become Chriſtian, the violent diſputes which aroſe between the ſeveral ſects of Chriſtians, (who arguing upon points above the comprehenſion of men, neceſſarily fell into oppoſite opinions) prevented the introduction of indifference. Many individuals there doubtleſs muſt have been, who were lukewarm, and even forgot the importance of Religion itſelf; but the gene-

* Acts xiii. 7—12.

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ral complexion of the times was not ſuch: it was of a kind, not indeed to preſerve Revelation in its purity, but rather to diſfigure it with vain and pernicious ſubtilties; but yet to maintain the juſt perſuaſion of its importance, and make it conſidered as the laſt thing in this world which a good man could relinquiſh or neglect.—Subſequent to theſe, were the times of overwhelming ignorance, increaſing corruption, and artfully deviſed ſuperſtition: in which, though the high importance of Religion was impiouſly miſapplied, and made the baſis on which to exalt the power and temporal dignity of the Prieſt, yet ſtill indifference was kept at a diſtance; and the zeal of men was at the ſame time moſt furious, and moſt blind.—When the evils attendant on ſuperſtition, for which even its zeal could by no means compenſate, had at length attained their height, the Reformation produced a ferment and a ſtruggle, which could not fail to keep in view the important nature of thoſe fundamental points for which men were contending. As long, therefore, as the conteſt continued with violence, we find few men of any ſituation in life, who did not, one way or other, feel themſelves

intereſted in what was then in agitation; few who did not expreſs a zeal for ſome perſuaſion or belief, and confeſs the neceſſity incumbent on them of conforming their lives, as well as they were able, to the rule they had embraced.—The ſubſiding of theſe mighty ſtorms, at length produced a calm, in the peace of which a thouſand advantages might juſtly be expected. A thouſand advantages have ariſen. The acrimony of mens minds has been corrected, perſecution has become hateful, toleration, and the benevolent ſpirit of true Chriſtianity have pervaded, in ſome degree, even thoſe ſects into which their admiſſion appeared the moſt improbable: but there is this one evil to be dreaded in particular, which, if it be not guarded againſt, may deprive us of every advantage, namely the riſe and formidable increaſe of religious indifference. In countries unreformed, the revolting abſurdity of ſeveral tenets ſuperadded to the ſimple texture of Chriſtianity, has produced in many an abſolute rejection of Revelation, in many more a kind of nominal faith, fearful to examine leſt it ſhould diſcover the imperfections of its ſyſtem; and not ſufficiently ſuperſtitious to believe ſtrongly without

without examination. In reformed eſtabliſhments, the plainneſs and ſimplicity of a doctrine unſupported by ſhow, and uninforced by violence, ſeems, in ſome inſtances at leaſt, to have wanted ſufficient hold of the unſtable tempers of mankind to keep them ſteady to their duty: and men, left to their own diſcretion for the performance of what religion requires, have been ſeduced by the tempting nature of temporal objects, to ruſh too blindly into the purſuit of them; and, in the tumult of theſe avocations almoſt, if not entirely, to forget Religion.

Yet the change of human opinions alters not the nature of things; the importance of Religion remains:—and the warning of the Apoſtle ſtill demands the moſt implicit attention: "See that Ye refuſe not *him that* "*ſpeaketh!*"—He who hath ſpoken is God, whoſe awful voice if man could hardly hear and live, neither can he, when it hath been uttered, poſſibly neglect its precepts and be guiltleſs.

From the notion of a Deity it is impoſſible for any man to ſeparate that of the utmoſt veneration and moſt implicit obedience due to him, from every creature. In compariſon

with his authority, that of every other being muſt be feeble and inſignificant;—the laws that he has impreſſed on our conſciences muſt demand exact obſervance, the commands that he has in any other way delivered muſt be received with no leſs perfect ſubmiſſion.—If there were only a vague report that God had ſpoken to mankind, it muſt become, to all who believed in his exiſtence, an indiſpenſible duty to examine into the truth of ſuch an aſſertion. As long as it is poſſible that he may have ſpoken, there can be no excuſe, but the want of means, for not enquiring whether it be ſo or not. In every government it is the concern of the ſubject to enquire out the laws which reſpect his own condition; the omiſſion of that ſearch he muſt abide at his peril, probably at his utmoſt peril. The higher the authority the more ſtrong muſt be this neceſſity, and it is not a few deſultory cavils which ought to paſs with any reaſonable perſon for arguments againſt that ſyſtem, which is ſanctioned by the awful name of God. A man muſt be little converſant with the artifices of miſuſed Reaſon, leſs indeed than, in an age like this, any man can well be imagined, who has not ſeen, in a thouſand inſtances unconnected with Religion,

ligion, how the plaineſt truth may be attacked by cavil, and the moſt indubitable fact diſfigured and rendered improbable by miſrepreſentation. While theſe arts are known to be practicable, are known to be daily practiſed, can it be excuſable in any man to let himſelf be deceived by them, and in matters of eternal moment to incur even the poſſibility of a deception, which he might have avoided?

If then even they who think they have reaſon to doubt of the truth of Revelation, be required, and in reaſon obliged by ſuch conſiderations, to examine into the merits of the cauſe; what ſhall we ſay of thoſe, by much the greater number, who, without pretending to diſbelieve, neglect and forget their Religion; of the multitudes who live in total negligence of that faith in which they have been bred; negligence, I mean, with reſpect to the ſtudy of its precepts, the performance of ſome of its poſitive duties, and of every thing which impreſſes and confirms that habitual veneration and reſpect, which every man is bound to entertain, for that which is ſo ſacred as the word of God? Of the numbers who live thus negligently, (for unhappily in the

preſent age, and in our country, this deſcription will include a numerous claſs,) how few are there who can pretend to diſbelieve that which they cannot but confeſs they overlook? —But what kind of life is this? believing that God has ſent down a Revelation, at leaſt not attempting to diſprove it, and living as if it were poſſible for ſuch a thing to exiſt, and yet to have no importance.—For Heaven's ſake let us be conſiſtent!—If we can refute what is ſaid by the aſſertors of Religion, let us refute it, and no longer ſuffer a fabric to remain, the foundations of which are placed in rottenneſs; but if we cannot ſhake it,—as, the truth is, no man can,—as it is founded on a rock againſt which even the powers of hell cannot prevail,—let us not ſuffer ſupineneſs, indolence, and an inordinate love of worldly things, to prevent us from attending to truths, which, before the foundation of the world, were eſtabliſhed; and to precepts, the conſequences of which will remain when not a trace of this globe ſhall be found in the volume of creation.

To plead a want of time for ſuch enquiries, if it be not diſhoneſty, is ſelf-deceit; ſince it is well known that whenever the high

importance of religion has been duly felt, the moſt occupied of men have found abundant time for every duty that a religious life exacts. Glorious examples are recorded of men involved in the buſieſt of all profeſſions, that peculiarly ſtudied in this place, who always ſet apart a ſtated portion of their hours to ſuch purſuits; yet felt not any want of time for ſuch employments as their ſtations put upon them: and were ſo far from being found deficient in any thing required, that they are to this hour extolled as men who were the light and boaſt of their profeſſion.

Nor can it poſſibly be urged that an application of this nature is not requiſite.

If other principles beſides thoſe delivered by Revelation can guide us equally well, Revelation was from the firſt unneceſſary, and we muſt be inclined, upon ſuch grounds, to doubt its proofs.—But if the proofs of it are ſuch as never can be invalidated, then muſt there of neceſſity be in it ſuch treaſures as cannot elſewhere be diſcovered. The morality of the world, the beſt ſubſtitute that can be found, is deficient in a thouſand points, but moſt materially in theſe, that it leaves am-

bition, pride, covetouſneſs, an earneſt attachment to the gratifications of this life, and a thouſand other faults of human nature uncorrected, unrepreſſed; nay frequently augmented and inflamed. The ſpirit of Chriſtianity can only be imbibed by a ſtudy of its ſacred books; and without that amiable, that angelic ſpirit, ſo beautifully exemplified in the humble and beneficent life of the divine Saviour on earth, and there only to be ſtudied and acquired, there is little reaſon to ſuppoſe that man can ever become qualified for the ſociety of the bleſſed in heaven. If this be a reward worth ſeeking, or if the puniſhment of the contrary neglect be a reaſonable object of fear, let us throw off that torpid negligence which has but too generally prevailed among us; and conſidering what is to be expected "if we "turn away from him that ſpeaketh from "heaven," return to him with penitence for the paſt, and fervour for the future; and become an holy people zealous of good works. What attraction there is in other ſtudies is well known to thoſe who purſue them; and if, on the ſame ground, the teſtimony of one long employed in the ſtudy of religion may be received, there is in it, according to the Pſalmiſt,

Pſalmiſt, " that which converteth the ſoul, maketh wiſe the ſimple, enlighteneth the eyes, rejoiceth the heart; that which is more to be deſired than fine gold, and ſweeter than the honeycomb *."—The ſuperiority of the ſecond covenant to the firſt is acknowledged; yet even of that were theſe things ſaid, even of that were men ordered to lay up the words in their hearts and in their ſouls; to bind them as a ſign upon their hands, and as a frontlet between their eyes; to teach them to their children, ſpeaking of them when they ſat in their houſes, when they walked by the way, when they lay down, and when they roſe up †. Let us not do leſs for the more perfect Revelation of Chriſt; but holding faſt the form of ſound words which we have heard, become not negligent of the word, but careful hearers; and not hearers only, but doers alſo.

Now to God, &c.

* Pſalm xix. &c. † Deut. xi.

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DISCOURSE VII.

ON THE HISTORY OF THE SEDUCED PROPHET.

1 KINGS xiii. 1.

And behold, there came a man of God out of Judah, by the word of the Lord unto Bethel.

AS the narrative which deſcribes the fate of this man of God is a part of ſacred hiſtory which, when read as the leſſon for the day, may leave ſome doubts and difficulties on the mind of the attentive hearer, and as it compriſes alſo many topics of inſtruction uſeful to be explained to all, I have determined to make it the ſubject of this day's diſcourſe.

The circumſtances are briefly theſe. Soon after the diviſion of the Jewiſh kingdom, Jeroboam, whoſe intereſt it was to keep the ten revolted tribes as much as poſſible apart from the two of Judah and Benjamin, from a wicked

a wicked policy, ſet up idols in the two extremities of his kingdom, at Dan and Bethel, that his people might worſhip them, and not go up at the ſtated feaſts to Jeruſalem, according to the Moſaic ordinance. This daring violation of the moſt ſacred laws, for which we find him generally ſtigmatized in holy writ by the name of *the man who cauſed Iſrael to ſin*, was ſoon followed by a public token of divine diſpleaſure.——A prophet was ſent from Judah to Bethel, to denounce the deſtruction of the altar and its prieſts; and, in confirmation of the prophecy, miraculous ſigns were exhibited upon the altar, and even on the perſon of the king himſelf. But the man of God, who had gone out under a ſtrict prohibition from abiding, or even taking refreſhment, in that polluted place, was, by another prophet, ſeduced from obeying the command he had received, and, by a miraculous interpoſition of divine power, ſuffered death for his tranſgreſſion.

In this hiſtory there are three principal matters which ſtrike moſt readers as extraordinary.

1. That the old prophet who lived at Bethel, and who, from ſeveral circumſtances, appears

appears to have been truly a prophet, ſhould have been deſirous to ſeduce the other from his duty.

2. That the prophet of Judah ſhould have fallen under the deception.

3. That, if the latter was indeed deceived, his puniſhment ſhould have been ſo ſevere and exemplary.

It will be our moſt convenient method to conſider theſe points ſeparately.

I. In the firſt place, for the purpoſe of explaining the character and motives of the old prophet of Bethel, we muſt correct ſome general notions with reſpect to the nature of prophetic inſpiration.—To the gift of prophecy we are apt to annex the notion of perfect holineſs, and even of infallibility. But we forget that an infallible man is a contradiction. Man is a frail and fallible being; by his own efforts he certainly cannot attain infallibility; and had he, by the ſame Spirit that gave him the power of foretelling future events, been rendered infallible, he would have been raiſed above the condition of his nature. We are far from having any warrant of ſcripture for confirming ſuch an imagination. Balaam is a ſtriking inſtance of a prophet

phet yielding to the ſeduction of vicious diſpoſitions; and even St. Paul, who, as a prophet under the Goſpel diſpenſation, was, by the teſtimony of Chriſt himſelf, far ſuperior even to the greateſt under the law, has in his writings told us of his vigilance and care over himſelf as neceſſary, leſt, with all his high advantages, he might himſelf fall under condemnation. We ſhould recollect that under the theocracy, or divine government of Iſrael, prophets, in the early times, at leaſt, were very numerous: colleges are ſaid to have been eſtabliſhed for the regular education of perſons to that high branch of miniſtry; and though we do not know that all who were thus brought up were actually favoured with divine intelligences, yet we are ſufficiently aſſured that many were. Had all theſe individuals been ſupernaturally rendered infallible, what a deviation would there have been from the general laws of Providence! what a number of men exempted from the univerſal condition of a probationary ſtate! this could not reaſonably have been expected; and from ſcripture, the only exiſting record of ſuch facts, we learn that it was not ſo ordered. At particular times, and for particular purpoſes only,

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a prophet was inſpired. In the general conduct of life he was left to act as a man, from the impulſes of his own mind, and the ſuggeſtions of his own diſpoſition. It might happen, therefore, though doubtleſs the conſciouſneſs of ſo high a privilege as the gift of prophecy would operate as a ſtrong reſtraint from many ſins; it might, however, happen, that a prophet might become depraved, and ſo it appears to have been in the inſtance now before us. The old prophet lived at Bethel, the very ſeat of the newly-eſtabliſhed idolatry. Had he been worthy of his office, he would, probably, have been called forth to denounce the vengeance of God againſt theſe crimes: had he been zealous for the honour of God, he would either have deſerted a place ſo defiled, or would, at leaſt, have teſtified, in ſome manner, his abhorrence of this idolatrous worſhip; inſtead of which it appears from the hiſtory, that he ſuffered his ſons to be actually preſent at the ſacrifices. Of his motive, therefore, for deceiving the prophet of Judah we ſhall not, perhaps, judge too harſhly if we ſuppoſe it to have been envy: his corrupted heart, though backward to exert itſelf in the cauſe of religion, repined to ſee another called

forth, in preference, to that diſtinguiſhed office. Or if he were not envious, at leaſt he was officious, and wiſhed to try the faith of one whoſe inſpiration, after what his ſons had related, he certainly had no right to doubt.

II. But how then, in the ſecond place, can we account for the ſucceſs of his deceit? Here again we have an inſtance of the fallibility of a prophet, and of the neceſſity of vigilant reſolution, even to one actually employed under a divine commiſſion: we have ſtill more, we have an inſtance calculated to prove that even the clearneſs of the divine revelation might itſelf be made the means of trial to him to whom it was communicated. The command of God to this prophet, howſoever conveyed, had doubtleſs been explicit. In the preſence of Jeroboam the prophet ſpake of it with the utmoſt firmneſs: "If "thou wilt give me half thine houſe I will "not go in with thee, neither will I eat "bread nor drink water in this place: for ſo "it was charged me *by the word of the Lord*, "ſaying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, "nor turn again by the ſame way that thou "cameſt." But when the old prophet came to ſolicit him, whether it was hunger that had

had abated his reſolution, or whether it was fatigue, for he was found reſting himſelf under an oak, he refuſed with much leſs ſteadineſs: he no longer declared that nothing ſhould prevail upon him, but merely ſaid, "I *may* not return with thee:" *I may not*, implying, perhaps, that he greatly wiſhed he might.—When a duty is clearly and poſitively known, the liſtening to falſe and frivolous arguments againſt it, is not merely weak, but criminal: it is yielding not to real conviction, but to corrupt inclination: it is deceiving ourſelves by a falſe pretence, and voluntarily relinquiſhing the candid uſe of judgment, leſt that judgment ſhould counteract our wiſhes.—There was nothing in what was ſaid by the man of Bethel which could have deceived the prophet of Judah, had he not been already more than half deceived by his own deſires: "He ſaid unto him, I am a "prophet of the Lord as thou art; and an "angel ſpake unto me by the word of the "Lord, ſaying, Bring him back with thee "into thine houſe, that he may eat bread "and drink water." Was this a teſtimony ſufficient to counterbalance a command which had been poſitively and clearly revealed?—

"I am a prophet."—How did that appear? merely by his own aſſertion, or at moſt perhaps by his dreſs*.—"A revelation was given "to me directly contrary to that which was "previouſly given to you."—This was in itſelf very ſuſpicious:—the divine Spirit cannot be ſuppoſed to act ſo capriciouſly:—if the Almighty think fit to diſpenſe with a command, he will ſurely reveal the diſpenſation to him who received the injunction. "But who is "this man who calls himſelf a prophet, and "perhaps is ſo, but pretends to have received "this inconſiſtent revelation?—He is one who "lives in Bethel, a place where I, as a man "of God, am forbidden to make an hour's "abode; a place where I have been ordered "to avoid even taking the ſlighteſt refreſh-"ment, leſt I ſhould in any degree partake "of its pollutions, or appear to give a ſanc-"tion to them: he then is ſurely a deceiver, "and I will not liſten to him, at leaſt not "without ſome ſign, or convincing proof of "his commiſſion." Such are the reflections which would moſt naturally have ariſen in

* It is ſaid by ſome authors that the Jewiſh prophets had a peculiar dreſs. See the commentators on Heb. xi. 37.

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the mind of the prophet of Judah, had he been as firmly reſolved in obedience when ſitting under the oak, as he was when he ſtood in the preſence of Jeroboam. But the face of things was altered; he was urged by fatigue and hunger to wiſh for ſome refreſhment; and ſeems entirely to have wanted that ſteady faith which Elijah and other prophets manifeſted, that God would in every extremity preſerve them, ſo long as they remained obedient. He was credulous, becauſe he wiſhed to be perſuaded; and liſtened to the groſſeſt fallacy, becauſe the refutation of it would have been unpleaſing: ſo dangerous it is to let our wiſhes ſtand in oppoſition to our duty, and ſo eaſily are the wiſeſt men deceived when inclination blinds their eyes.

III. When we come, therefore, to the conſideration of the third difficulty, which ariſes from the ſeverity of the prophet's puniſhment, we muſt not forget that his fault was greater than at firſt ſight it appears. A man who tranſgreſſes through natural infirmity, or is over-reached by great ſubtilty, and circumvented by artifices which he could not poſſibly detect, deſerves compaſſion: but he who, for his own indulgence, is glad to be deceived,

muſt be viewed in a very different light; and in proportion to the clearneſs of evidence in the matter of duty, the fault of tranſgreſſion will be increaſed. Though we know not the exact manner of the revelations made in thoſe times to the prophets, we are certain that there was nothing doubtful in them: whether the Lord had commanded or not, a prophet could not but be certain; and indeed the poſitive nature of this prophet's anſwer to Jeroboam proves that there was not any doubt exiſting in his mind concerning the divine prohibition.—"If thou wilt give me half "thine houſe I will not go in with thee— "for ſo it was charged me by the word of "the Lord." Something, therefore, more than at firſt ſight appears was involved in this proceeding; nor can the prophet properly be conſidered as an unaſſiſted man, failing through infirmity, or an innocent man deceived.

The next matter that deſerves our attention is the nature and notoriety of the whole tranſaction. On the occaſion of a great and daring apoſtacy, of a public and royal defection from the true worſhip, a prophet was expreſsly ſent to propheſy againſt the idol

altar.

altar. In the preſence of the king and all his idolatrous congregation, this prophet had made known the anger and the will of God, and his words had been confirmed by immediate ſigns and miracles. No ſooner was this done, than, in the ſame aſſembly, he had publicly declared to the offending king, that he was expreſsly forbidden to ſtay, or take refreſhment in his territories. If it was concluded, at the time, from this circumſtance, as very juſtly it might, that the great anger of the Lord, againſt the pollutions and abominations of Bethel, had cauſed this prohibition to his prophet, how much muſt that leſſon and that warning have been weakened by the ſuppoſition that ſuch a command had been retracted, or the knowledge that it had been with impunity diſobeyed! Very fatally muſt it have weakened the effect of the prophecy ſo ſolemnly delivered, had it appeared that the prophet by whom it was uttered had ſaid one thing and done another, and by his actions had contradicted his public and moſt poſitive declaration: whereas, on the contrary, his miraculous death became a third ſign in the eyes of the people, an additional proof of his veracity, ſince what he had pub-

licly declared himſelf forbidden to do, he was no leſs publicly chaſtiſed for doing. In the ordinary courſe of human life, indeed, we do not look for immediate interpoſitions of Providence to puniſh the tranſgreſſor; but under the peculiar government of the Jewiſh people, and in the caſe of a prophet, it was not unreaſonable to expect it.—To all this we may add, that, even in our eſtimation of the ſeverity of the prophet's chaſtiſement, we may poſſibly deceive ourſelves. The infliction of death, though in the hands of worldly judges the very extreme of puniſhment, is not ſo by any means in the hand of God. The man whom he removes from this world, God may reward in another ſtate of exiſtence; and the cutting him off at an early period of tranſgreſſion, may prevent him from drawing upon himſelf a heavier condemnation. There is indeed every appearance that the wrath of heaven, in this caſe of the prophet, was fully appeaſed by the forfeiture of life: the lion which ſlew him neither devoured nor carried off the body, but became a guard upon it:—an honourable ſepulture was granted, and three hundred years after, when the prophecy uttered by this man of God was accompliſhed

by Joſiah, his bones were honourably diſtinguiſhed, and preſerved from violation:—the lion, therefore, took only that life which diſeaſe, or the common decay of nature, muſt, at no very diſtant period, have deſtroyed; but then the death thus inflicted, inſtead of being common and unnoticed, became a leſſon, a warning, a miracle, and a ſign.

But the deceitful prophet met with no puniſhment, and went down to his grave in peace. I know not what we can conclude from this fact, except that apparent ſecurity is no proof of divine approbation, and that under the peculiar, as well as under the general Providence of God, all things are not ſquared and managed according to the meaſure of human notions, but determined by higher motives, and upon principles at preſent beyond our reach.—That God ſhould approve his deceit is impoſſible: but with him this was not the beginning of tranſgreſſions; in remaining at the ſeat of idolatry, and giving, by his reſidence, a kind of countenance to its pollutions, he had committed more ſin than the fangs of a lion could avenge, and might be reſerved therefore either to fill up the meaſure of his guilt, or, what is more

probable, to expiate his offences by ſincere and effectual repentance. To this the dreadful puniſhment of the brother he had deceived appears immediately to have led: for his ſubſequent zeal to bring back his body, to mourn over, and to bury him, placing him in his own ſepulchre, and giving a peculiar charge, that when he died, his own bones ſhould be placed with thoſe of the deceaſed; all theſe are evidently the acts of a man anxiouſly deſirous to make what melancholy reparation yet remained in his power for the evil he had done: a ſtate of mind attendant always on repentance, and likely to induce a general examination of himſelf, a conſciouſneſs and a dereliction of all his ſins.

The leſſons which we may deduce for ourſelves from this remarkable hiſtory are of conſiderable importance.

It teaches us to be very watchfully on our guard againſt the deceitfulneſs of our own inclinations: it warns us, in matters of duty that are clear and evident, not to liſten to any arguments, or be perſuaded by any pretences which are deſigned to ſeduce us from obedience. In a mind well inſtructed, the firſt movement of the conſcience is uſually right,

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the determination that is made at once and without reflection is generally the moſt impartial; for it is not from any difficulty which attends the diſcerning of our duty, but from the facility with which we ſuffer ourſelves to be perſuaded from it, and to give up our firſt perceptions, that our greateſt danger ariſes. When we take time to conſider what intereſts will be affected, or what difficulties incurred, by the ſtrict performance of that which is enjoined, or when theſe intereſts begin to be affected, or thoſe dangers to preſs upon us, then it is that we ought to ſuſpect our weakneſs; for then the work of ſophiſtry begins, then do we frame diſtinctions that have no ſolidity, and hearken to arguments that are without weight, till, unleſs we are extricated by a ſtrong and active reſolution, we are entangled in a web of our own weaving, and periſh by our own perverſe ingenuity.

We may learn alſo from this hiſtory to rely on God in difficulties which the obſervance of our duty brings upon us: for though the time has long been paſt, in which ſuch miraculous preſervation as the prophet of Judah might have looked for in his diſtreſs can reaſonably

ſonably be expected; though no ravens will bring us food in the wilderneſs, nor will our nature be enabled to ſubſiſt without ſupport; yet ſtill there are reſources in the Providence of God on which a good man ſhould depend: if he be not ſnatched from danger, he will at leaſt be ſupported under it; and ſhould preſent deſtruction overwhelm him, in the ſteady proſecution of acknowledged duty, his hopes are yet immortal, and refer him for his recompence to a life of which no violence ever can deprive him.

We may make it alſo a topic of our conſideration, that if perſons favoured by the actual communication of divine knowledge, were yet liable, without due watchfulneſs over themſelves, to fall into tranſgreſſion, we, who are not thus gifted, ought on no account to indulge ourſelves in falſe ſecurity: if we are willing diligently to perform our parts, the grace of God will not fail to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen us; but if we are negligent and careleſs, we ſhall find ourſelves beſet with ſnares, and our ſteps haſtening only to deſtruction.

Laſtly; Having found that a ſerious conſideration of the difficulties contained in this hiſtory

hiſtory has enabled us to ſatisfy our minds about them, let us learn to be very backward in ſuſpecting any thing amiſs in the writings of the ſacred penmen;—an obſtacle which will not give way to a ſlight touch, by a ſtronger effort may be removed; and a weight which the ſtrength of one man cannot raiſe, by another may be lifted up, and put aſide without much difficulty. So is it with the ſacred writings; what to a ſlight and careleſs obſerver appears ſtrange and inconſiſtent, by one more attentive or acute will eaſily be underſtood; what the underſtanding of one man cannot explain, that of another may interpret readily: and the things which no man can interpret, the high and hidden myſteries of our creation and redemption, even they, will perhaps be expounded to us hereafter, if we labour to attain that place and exaltation, which confers the ineſtimable privilege of partaking in ſuch heavenly knowledge. We ſhall then look with the holy angels into the great deſigns of God, and ſtudy the wiſdom of his diſpenſations.—This privilege, and the glory, and the happineſs attendant on it, let us not loſe for want of preſent truſt and faith, let us not

hazard

hazard by remiſſion of vigilance, let us not reject by a mean and ſordid preference of joys annexed to mortality, or of apparent advantages ſtill more vain and periſhable than ourſelves.

Now to God, &c.

DIS-

DISCOURSE VIII.

ON PROVING ALL THINGS.

1 THESS. V. 21.

Prove all things: hold faſt that which is good.

WHATEVER may have been taught, in corrupt times, within the Church, concerning a blind and implicit faith; or whatever may have been falſely urged, in times yet more corrupt, in many points, againſt ſuch churches as abhor that doctrine; it never was the ſpirit or intention of the Goſpel to diſcourage ſober enquiry, or rational examination. Whoever ſhould attempt to fix this accuſation upon it, muſt have forgotten in what manner men were firſt converted. It was not ſaid to men, *you muſt* believe that Jeſus, Paul, Peter, and others worked miracles, or *you muſt* admit the doctrines they inculcate; but, conſider what they actually do before your eyes, and then *judge* whether the

the power of God do not bear witneſs for them; conſider the nature of their doctrines, and then decide for yourſelves whether they be not worthy to be admitted as divine. "Try "the ſpirits, whether they be of God:"—"prove all things:"—"be ready to give a "reaſon for your faith."—From ſuch beginnings did the Chriſtian Faith originate, and by ſuch acts alone was it built up; if then implicit faith came in at all, it was not as a fundamental point, but as a conſequence of ſomething done before. As for inſtance, when the authority of the teachers, and the authenticity of their words have been determined by ſound reaſon, then begins the implicit faith of a Chriſtian; admitting without reſerve, however repugnant to his former prepoſſeſſions, whatever he is fully authorized to call the *Word of God*. If in any other form implicit Faith, at any time uſurped a place among the Chriſtian duties, it had been introduced for the purpoſe of facilitating ſome corrupt addition, or eſtabliſhing ſome abuſe.

Solomon, ſpeaking indeed on another ſubject, but a ſubject analogous to this, well deſcribes the different characters of men. "The

"ſimple

" ſimple believeth every word: but the pru-
" dent man looketh well to his going; a wiſe
" man feareth, and departeth from evil: but
" the fool rageth and is confident *." Theſe words, which I ſhould have taken as my text, had their original ſenſe entirely coincided with my purpoſe, may afford at leaſt a clue to guide us in our enquiry; and teach us to diſcriminate the characters of men according to the nature of their faith.—Thus ſhall we, in conſidering the words of the Apoſtle, " Prove all things," perceive the whole extent of his precept, and learn what we are to avoid, as well as what to do.

" The ſimple," ſaith the Royal teacher, " believeth every word." It is evident, therefore, that *he* doth not *prove all things:* and that this ſimplicity is what the ſcriptures rather mark with cenſure, than hold up to imitation; and repreſent as pitiable, at leaſt, if not criminal. Indeed, if any tribute to the wiſdom of God can be given by the approbation of reaſonable creatures, if any portion of that tranſcendent glory which flows to him from all parts ought to be derived from this ſource, it muſt come from thoſe who ex-

* Prov. xiv. 15, 16.

amine,

amine, not from thoſe who dream; from thoſe who give aſſent or praiſe upon good grounds, not thoſe who pay them as a tax, they know not why; nor can aſſign a cauſe for what they ſay. Such approbation, or rather adulation, even a man of any ſpirit has dignity ſufficient to reject; it cannot therefore be an incenſe fit for God. In matters of faith, to aſſent without examination is not, in truth, to give a real aſſent; without a reaſon to determine its judgment the mind feels no conviction; and where no examination is attempted, no reaſon can be found. Contraſted with this ſimplicity, is the conduct of the prudent man, *who looketh well to his going*; he meaſures his ſteps, and is careful to know whither he proceeds, and on what ground: his aſſent is rational, and his conviction ſincere. On the other hand, where ſufficient proof is found to lead his mind to that determination, "the wiſe man feareth, "and departeth from evil:" he reforms his life according to thoſe precepts which he has thus approved as holy: but the fool, another kind of fool from that before alluded to, "rageth, and is confident:" denies the truths he ought to own, rejects the authority it is his

his duty to obey, and, without the ſlighteſt cauſe for ſuch preſumption, is full of inſolence and confidence. As it is one ſpecies of folly to admit all things without examination or proof, ſo is it an equal blindneſs, but infinitely more pernicious, to reject every thing with the ſame indiſcriminating precipitance; and even to rage againſt that which is true, from a confident, though totally unfounded aſſumption, that it is falſe.

From both of theſe infatuations, an attention to fulfil the precept of the Apoſtle will effectually preſerve us; "prove all things, "hold faſt that which is good," deſcribing exactly the conduct of Solomon's prudent man, who looketh well to his going, and having ſo looked, feareth, and departeth from evil.

With reſpect to ſuch as implicitly believe whatever may be offered to them, or at leaſt profeſs to believe, giving an irrational aſſent, which is not true belief, it is ſufficient to have remarked that they are far from having any warrant of ſcripture, much leſs any invitation from it, to authorize their blind credulity: and that the Goſpel demands not merely nominal, but rational faith. Thus

much may be neceſſary to defend Religion from imputations originating in an abuſe of its name, and falſe pretences of its authority. As for the evil itſelf, of thus credulouſly aſſenting, it is not at the preſent day ſo prevalent, at leaſt among the poliſhed claſſes of ſociety, as to demand much admonition from the Pulpit. The folly of "believing every word" is by no means an urgent or increaſing evil, but may be left to find its cure in the natural progreſs of information; happy they who find it not, where too many have already found it, in the oppoſite and much worſe evil of infidelity.

But when we talk of proving all things, it may be not a little important to conſider what is the nature and the tendency of *their* conduct, who, in matters of Religion, venture to *pronounce* without having proved; upon a ſuperficial examination, if any; perhaps without the formality even of one attentive hour: who venture to pronounce not for, but againſt its ſanctions and authority; to decide that God has not afforded us a promiſe of immortality; that he hath not vouchſafed to ſpeak to man, nor to be watchful for his happineſs: making themſelves outcaſts from providence, from all its care, and all the bleſſed hopes

hopes of Religion, without ſo much meditation on a ſubject of ſuch infinite importance, as they would give to the moſt trivial point of worldly intereſt. That this is *irrational* is ſurely evident, that it is too common, the knowledge of every one who hears me will probably bear witneſs: it is indeed a thing which, in the preſent times, one cannot live among mankind without obſerving, and certainly cannot behold without much horror. Indeed, of the many perſons we meet, who (ſince unhappily there is no ſhame attached to the confeſſion, but rather a falſe pride, and aſſumption of ſuperiority) are not backward to confeſs, that their opinions militate againſt Religion, how few are there who will even pretend that they have ſtudied on the ſubject. Yet it is undoubtedly a matter of ſtudy, and, what might give theſe haſty deciders ſome ſuſpicion of their error, a ſtudy of ſuch a tendency, that they who actually enter into it, form, almoſt univerſally, the contrary concluſion. They who ſtudiouſly enquire become, in general, believers: they who give but ſlight and curſory attention to the ſubject, or not any, perſiſt in unbelief.

Of this raſh, and dreadfully precipitate deciſion, the moſt uſual foundation is ſome

general poſition boldly aſſumed, as being, what it certainly is not, ſelf-evident; and, with equal reaſon, relied on blindly, as irrefragable.—Some, for inſtance, think it not to be believed that God ſhould make an actual Revelation of his will to man. Which having once aſſumed, they think it not material to take further thought upon the ſubject. Whether they ſuppoſe that the lights to which man is conducted by his natural faculties are ſufficient for all purpoſes of regulation; that it is not conſiſtent with divine wiſdom to have formed a ſyſtem which ſhould require ſuch interference; or not conſiſtent with the infinite majeſty of God ſo to condeſcend to viſit and inſtruct his creatures: whether theſe or any other imaginable reaſons form the baſis of the deciſion, it is moſt evident that they all proceed, and muſt proceed, upon the ſuppoſition of a knowledge both of God and of ourſelves greater than is in truth attainable?

It is a bold thing to decide what it is unfit for God to do, evil only excepted: for as to what appears to us unwiſe, if the reaſons for it only lie beyond our reach they may be infinitely ſtrong, and yet be to our minds as if they were without exiſtence. Thus there have

have been times when preſumptuous reaſoners ventured to arraign the wiſdom of contrivance in the viſible creation, whoſe objections, ſpecious at the time, and not to be refuted as the knowledge of mankind then ſtood, have ſince, by the mere progreſs of enquiry, been ſubverted totally. After all there is a queſtion of fact, in all ſuch matters, which well deſerves to be put in competition with any previous hypotheſis; namely, is it not actually ſo, that God has revealed himſelf, whatever may be our notions on the ſubject?

A very little experience in the examination, or acquaintance with the hiſtory of human opinions, will ſhow how miſerable a figure hypotheſis continually makes, when put in competition with the actual trial of the fact. —Full many a ſpecious theory, ſince the eſtabliſhment of experimental enquiry, has fallen to the ground, never again to raiſe its head, unleſs it ſhould, after any general extinction of knowledge, be called by ignorance from its obſcurity; and well known, indeed, it is, that to build up theories, without a ſtrong foundation of experiments, long tried, and patiently compared, in every poſſible view, is a reproach to any man of ſcience. No

man will riſk his reputation on mere theory. What then? Is ſalvation leſs, infinitely leſs than common reputation, that a man ſhall riſk it, not only upon theory, but upon the moſt ſubtile and fallacious of all theories, a metaphyſical theory; built on an hypotheſis of which the very ſubject matter is involved in total darkneſs. Appeal, appeal to facts, ye deciders on Religion! Prove what can be proved, and then, if indeed there be nothing to hold faſt, you may with a ſafe conſcience relinquiſh the whole doctrine.

With reſpect to this great fact, whether God has actually revealed his will to men or not, you cannot continually have the proofs repeated to you, or even preſent to your memory; but I will venture to remind you of two ſtrong experiments, if I may call them ſo, which ſeem directly to decide the point in the affirmative. One indeed is paſt, and cannot be repeated; but the other you may make for yourſelves, every one in his own hours of meditation, and, from its general ſucceſs, I may almoſt undertake to anſwer for the reſult.

The firſt of theſe was the complete trial of the queſtion, when the evidences of it were fully before the eyes of men, when the Goſpel

was

was firſt preached by its great author and his followers. The ſecond is the experiment which every man makes for himſelf, who cautiouſly and candidly enquires into the ſtill ſubſiſting evidences of the fact.

In the firſt caſe it happened, that they who had moſt opportunity of knowing Jeſus, who obſerved daily how he lived, and finally how he died, who hourly viewed his actions, and heard all his words, believed him to be the Meſſiah, the Son of God, the Meſſenger of Salvation to mankind. They even believed that they beheld him living again after death, and in that ſtate converſed with him during many days, at the end of which they ſaw him taken into heaven; and theſe things not one or two of them alone believed, but all: and ſo firmly were they fixed in that belief, that though no intereſt led them to maintain it, though they maintained it to their daily diſadvantage, yet the higheſt worldly intereſts could not bring them to deny it. Nor was this all; for the fact was that theſe men, though low-born and illiterate perſons, having nothing but their own ſtrong faith and perſuaſion to plead, (unleſs they had, what we conceive them to have had, miraculous powers) ſucceeded in convincing multitudes,

and leading them to hold invincibly the ſame belief. Here then is the firſt experiment, as far as the human faculties are capable of trying it, completely ſucceſsful to eſtabliſh the affirmative, that God did ſend his bleſſed Son to teach mankind his will. It is ſomething gained towards the deciſion of a queſtion, to know how they decided it, who had the fulleſt means of forming a true judgment on it.

The ſecond conſideration I would ſuggeſt, as a ſort of experiment, is this, that even at the preſent day, they who moſt carefully enquire into the evidences of theſe things, are they who the moſt ſteadily believe. The unbelievers are, in general, the thoughtleſs and the gay, the light and ſuperficial, averſe to the fatigue of weighing evidence, or naturally incapable of it. Such are the generality. Of the few whom this herd follows, thoſe who pretend to reaſon and ſagacity, and even to Philoſophy, how few have ever been patient and ſtudious enquirers! Will not the claſſes of Wits, more ſtudious of amuſement than of truth, of debauchees ſeeking juſtification, of metaphyſical adventurers, ſeeking fame by paradox and ſubtilty, almoſt abſorb them all? Very

different

different is the deſcription of believers. In every order of men, but principally, I am happy to obſerve and to declare, in that which is moſt verſed in ſifting evidence through all the intricacies of proof, and diſtinguiſhing the true from falſe, numbers will be found who believe becauſe they have examined, who hold faſt that which is good, becauſe they have firſt proved it.

Nor ſhall I fear or heſitate to cite, upon this point, the belief of the Clergy. Illiberality indeed is forward to accuſe us of teaching what we do not ourſelves believe, of holding out a lure to draw in the unwary and the ignorant, and of being actuated ſolely by motives of temporal intereſt. Heaven knows, the intereſts of our order are not ſo intimately joined with the appearances of zeal for our Religion, as to tempt us for that reaſon to be hypocrites; too frequently is it ſeen that there is more worldly wiſdom in the oppoſite conduct, and that they who wear their principles moſt looſely have moſt ſucceſs in pleaſing a corrupted world. But the pretence of cant and prieſtcraft is too convenient for thoſe, on whom the ſtrong conviction of a ſerious preacher muſt otherwiſe have great effect,

fect, to be relinquiſhed eaſily, however little there may be of truth to warrant it. True is it, moſt unfortunately true, that in this claſs as well as others, there are ſome who wilfully neglect their duty, ſome who have neither talents nor inclination for attentive enquiry. True is it, that even the awful miniſtry and attendance on God's Holy Altar does not, in all caſes, teach men to ſubdue their paſſions; nor do the truths that they are obliged officially to repeat, always ſink down effectually into the minds of thoſe who utter them: but among the Clergy who have knowledge, and appear alſo to have zeal, I ſhould be ſurpriſed to find even one, who wanted a ſound Faith. The reſult is, that the conviction of the learned and pious among the Clergy, which is uſually the more ſtrong as they are the more informed, affords a ſtriking proof that our Religion bears the teſt of the moſt minute enquiry; of a whole life ſpent chiefly in enquiry.

Whether it be Clergy or whether it be laity that ſeriouſly enquire into the evidences of our holy Religion, the progreſs is naturally this. I ſpeak from the experience of one, which I believe to have been realized in other inſtances beyond number. Setting out with

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ſome doubts and difficulties, the doubts and difficulties of ignorance,—for who in this ſceptical age can totally eſcape them, except by actual knowledge?—they ſee their way clear gradually before them. Like the ſuppoſed illuſions of enchantment, obſtacles that ſeemed inſuperable, vaniſh on approach, and mingle with the air, or ſink down to the regions that produced them; and every day of new enquiry diminiſhes the number of difficulties, and more completely opens the foundations of the truth: till from long and frequent experience a concluſion not unreaſonable is drawn upon the principles of analogy; that every doubt and difficulty in the Chriſtian Religion ſubſiſts only by the want of due enquiry or of neceſſary knowledge. Some points of doctrine indeed there are, the knowledge required to elucidate which lies beyond the reach of our preſent faculties, and which conſequently muſt remain difficult as long as we continue here: but theſe are neither greater, nor in truth ſo great, nor by any means ſo numerous, as thoſe which the rejection of that revelation neceſſarily involves.

Let me exhort then all who are at any time perplexed with doubts, to ſuſpend, at leaſt, their

their judgment, till they can have leiſure to enquire, recollecting that they who do enquire uſually find ſatisfaction. To all, let me recommend, moſt ſtrongly, the advice of the Apoſtle, to prove all things, and having proved, invincibly to hold faſt whatever they ſhall have found to be the truth. So will they be able to approve their conduct to their own hearts, and in the ſight of God: and ſo, I may very ſafely promiſe, will they obtain a firm and rational faith, incapable of wavering, and formed to lead them to ſalvation.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE IX.

ON THE REGARD OF GOD FOR THE TEMPORAL WELFARE OF MEN.

DEUT. v. 29.

O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

ACCUSTOMED to hear, though too frequently with little profit, those precepts which Religion opposes to the inordinate love of present gratification, we are apt occasionally to forget that the whole system is intended to promote and to extend our happiness. Men of gloomy minds have thought to purchase the favour of God by rendering their own lives miserable; and such as were unwilling to pay that price for obtaining it, have sometimes learnt to hate religion, as demanding

demanding ſacrifices which they eſteemed unreaſonable.—The words of my text, which were delivered to Moſes from heaven, afford ſufficient proof how tender a regard the Father of mercy entertained even for the temporal welfare of his people, concerning whom it was ſpoken. "O that there were ſuch an "heart in them!"—no wiſh can be more feelingly expreſſed.

That obedience to the divine commands, at that time revealed, would have made the Jews a happy people, as diſobedience reduced them to the condition of miſerable outcaſts, cannot poſſibly be doubted, the terms having been expreſsly ſet before them from the beginning. "Behold," ſaid the inſpired legiſlator, "I ſet before you this day a bleſſing "and a curſe; a bleſſing, if ye obey the "commandments of the Lord your God, "which I command you this day; and a "curſe, if ye will not obey the command-"ments of the Lord your God, but turn "aſide out of the way which I command you "this day, to go after other gods, which ye "have not known *." Of this bleſſing and this curſe the particular circumſtances are in

* Deut. xi. 26, 27, 28.

another

another place explicitly declared. The bleſſing conſiſts of ſeaſonable rains, ſo as to produce all the increaſe of the earth in the greateſt abundance, inſomuch that it ſhould be a conſtant employment to gather in, and to diſpoſe of the riches of the ſoil; "your threſhing "ſhall reach unto the vintage, and the vin-"tage ſhall reach unto the ſowing time *." Added to this continual plenty, there was to be profound peace and ſecurity from enemies internal and external, and even from the ravages of wild beaſts: or if at any time they were attacked, they were to be armed with ſuch ſtrength that "five ſhould chaſe an "hundred, and an hundred ſhould put ten "thouſand to flight." The increaſe of their numbers was to be proportioned to their wealth and ſecurity, and God promiſed at all times to dwell with, and to be watchful over them. Theſe promiſes may be found at large in the 26th chapter of Leviticus, and again in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, where bleſſings are, in a manner, heaped upon the people of Iſrael, if they will but conſent to be obedient. In theſe and many other paſſages contained in the books of the Moſaic law, may

* Levit. xxvi. 5, &c.

be

be ſeen, beyond all controverſy, the earneſt deſire of the divine lawgiver to make his people happy, would they but have conſented to receive his bleſſings on the terms propoſed. That they ſeldom enjoyed the fruits of this benevolent diſpoſition towards them, can be aſcribed only to their invincible perverſeneſs, and headlong obſtinacy, in joining the worſhip of abominable idols to that of Him who brought them out of the land of Egypt. By this rebellious conduct they ſo completely changed their condition, that the curſes previouſly denounced by the lawgiver againſt diſobedience contain a kind of hiſtory of the ſufferings of the Jewiſh people; in which their captivity, diſperſion, ſubjection to the Romans, and even the calamities which were actually realized in the final ſiege of Jeruſalem, are ſet down with an exactneſs, which proves beyond a doubt that He who made the threats had the power alſo to fulfil them. It is impoſſible to compare thoſe chapters with the events which ſo many ages after took place, without aſtoniſhment, and, I ſhould think, without conviction. But on this part of my ſubject it is not my preſent purpoſe to enlarge. The reference it has to

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our preſent argument is only this: That the deſire of God towards his people was in all reſpects benevolent; that he wiſhed to promote, to the very utmoſt, even their temporal felicity; and that if they fell, as certainly they did, into ſufferings and miſeries, it was not without being moſt fully and fairly warned; and was the conſequence of their own tranſgreſſions; of incurable obſtinacy, and repeated diſobedience.

Under the ſecond covenant the circumſtances of things are indeed a good deal changed; temporal advantages are no longer inſeparably annexed to obedience, becauſe there have been obtained for us promiſes of a nature ſo ſuperior, as to make their value as nothing in the compariſon; yet ſtill does it remain true that the Lord reſpects the temporal welfare of his people, and would not have them ſuffer preſent evil, for any other purpoſe than that of obtaining advantages greater, beyond all kind of competition, in the land to which he leads them. In a word, were it poſſible that men ſhould invariably enjoy all worldly happineſs, and yet be rendered worthy of all heavenly, there is in the divine nature no envious or ungenerous

diſpoſition by which the former would be withheld. The deſire of God to promote the temporal felicity of mankind, may be ſeen moſt clearly even in the nature of the Goſpel precepts; wherein what are the actions forbidden as crimes?—but thoſe whereby juſtice is inſulted, the peace of ſociety deſtroyed, and contention, with all its attendant miſeries, introduced. What are the actions enjoined as duties?—but thoſe which unite mankind to each other in brotherly love and ſympathy, the ſtrongeſt bonds of happineſs; which produce the alleviation of wants and ſufferings of every kind, and the moſt general diffuſion of every comfort. What are the diſpoſitions of mind forbidden?—chiefly thoſe which render the breaſt wherein they are harboured a torment, and a hell to itſelf; malice, hatred, envy, covetouſneſs, and a formidable liſt of paſſions, which may be called, not improperly, with reſpect even to this preſent world, the ſeeds of certain miſery. What are the internal diſpoſitions recommended?—Piety, benevolence, patience, contentment, reſignation: habits by which thoſe evils which cannot in this world be removed, may be in a wonderful degree alleviated; and which, when

when no particular misfortunes preſs, diffuſe a ſteady glow of ſunſhine over the mind, which nothing but the brightneſs of immortal happineſs can poſſibly ſurpaſs. On earth our Saviour went about removing, by his miraculous aſſiſtance, the bodily ſufferings of men; when departing from it, he left a treaſure of inſtructions, which, if they will not counteract thoſe external evils, which he in perſon removed, for the ſtill more dangerous and tormenting maladies of the ſoul, contain remedies which are infallible. Such are the precepts of this ſecond law, that were they univerſally obeyed, the reſult would be the ſame as that promiſed to obedience under the firſt, namely, univerſal peace, proſperity, and happineſs. A world of perfectly obedient Chriſtians, would be, by the natural effect of the abolition of crimes and extravagant paſſions, and by the prevalence of benevolent diſpoſitions, what the nation of the Jews would have been, had they not rebelled, by the actual interpoſition of God: "*Bleſſed* in the "city, and *bleſſed* in the field; *bleſſed* in the "fruit of their bodies, and in the fruits of "the ground; *bleſſed* in their coming in,

"and *bleſſed* in their going out *." So that the tender wiſh of Him who governed them, and with no leſs parental affection watches over us, may ſtill be ſuffered to vibrate in our ears, as the true expreſſion of his diſpotion towards us: "O that there were ſuch "an heart in them that they would fear me, "and keep my commandments always, that "it might be well with them, and with "their children for ever!"—This is everlaſtingly the juſt repreſentation of Him in whom there is no change or ſhadow of turning. God would have men happy here, but not in ſuch a manner as to render them miſerable hereafter: he regards their preſent well-being, but in due ſubordination to that which is infinitely more important; as a tender father delights at all times to gratify his children, but not by ſuch indulgences as he knows will make them vicious, or otherwiſe wretched, in maturer age.

From this accurate repreſentation of the diſpoſition of God towards us, we may deduce for ourſelves very uſeful conſiderations and rules, on the ſubject of temporal happineſs.

* Deut. xxviii. 3, &c.

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In the firſt place we may regard it, as that, which, by all fair and innocent means, we are permitted to purſue for ourſelves. In the ſecond, as that, which on no pretence we are authoriſed to take from others.

The former conſideration may ſerve to keep us in good humour with Religion; and to aſſure us, that no wilful ſelf-tormentings, no renouncing of the common comforts and conveniencies of life, no gloomy auſterities, no flying into deſerts *, are neceſſary, or even acceptable in the ſight of heaven. In works of charity we are told that God loveth a cheerful giver; in all other exerciſes of piety it is equally true that God loveth a cheerful ſervice; to praiſe him, to give him thanks, to rejoice in his holy name, to love him with all the heart and ſoul, theſe are duties very frequently and very ſtrongly enjoined, but they are duties which cannot poſſibly be fulfilled by him, who lives in the perſuaſion that God never can be ſatisfied till man has rendered himſelf miſerable. To renounce the world and all its pleaſures, is indeed a duty, whenever God requires it; but on the pro-

* Nor ſtarving upon the ſummit of a column, like *Simeon Stylites*, and his fanatic followers.

priety or neceſſity of ſo doing, God only can decide. Were all mankind to renounce it, there would be nothing left to renounce. God deſires the happineſs of all men, our individual happineſs therefore is not excepted; and though we have over this more right than over that of others, yet wantonly to caſt it away, is to reſiſt his purpoſes, and deſpiſe his gifts. When the fit occaſion ariſes, the call will not be wanting, which even then by human frailty cannot fully be anſwered, without the eſpecial interpoſition of divine aſſiſtance. Strong trials are ſituations of danger; to ruſh into them voluntarily, whatever reaſon we may have to hope for the aſſiſtance of God, is preſumptuous. It was the ſuggeſtion of the devil to our Saviour, to caſt himſelf from the pinnacle of the temple without occaſion.

But though we are aſſured that God, in his tender love towards us, regards even our worldly happineſs, and would not have us prodigally caſt it from us, without obtaining more than an equivalent, yet muſt our purſuit of it be regulated by ſeveral reſtrictions. Our perſuaſion of his attention to it will not, on our parts, authorize an immoderate attachment, but ought only to fix within us a

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firm aſſurance, that without ſome higher purpoſe he will not take it from us. He, whoſe wiſdom is unerring, conſiders indeed our temporal intereſts, but infinitely more conſiders thoſe of eternal life: we, whoſe beſt wiſdom lies in imitating, whenever we are able, the perfections of his nature, ſhould regulate our wiſhes by the ſame juſt eſtimate; working out the one with cheerful diligence and thankful hearts, whenever the other does not interfere; but relinquiſhing without heſitation the inferior object the moment that a competition ariſes. Whenever duty ſtands oppoſed to inclination, there is that competition; and happy they who, in all ſuch circumſtances, can form a right deciſion!—to receive with thankfulneſs, and to relinquiſh without repining, is the golden rule reſpecting temporal advantages, the perfection of pious diſcipline. Such are the conſiderations on this ſubject which chiefly regard ourſelves.

With reſpect to others, we muſt conſider God as the conſtant guardian and promoter of their welfare, and even of their temporal happineſs; which if we injuriouſly diminiſh or deſtroy, we are accountable to him, as counteractors of his deſigns, and aliens from

his benevolent ſyſtem. In promoting their advantages we co-operate with him; moſt glorioufly, indeed, when by any means we are happily enabled to lead them on to ſpiritual bleſſings; but not unuſefully, and in a manner which he will not fail to reward, when we miniſter to them even in worldly things. Under the former covenant ſuch good acts were indeed enjoined, but it was with ſome reſtrictions: the good offices of the Iſraelites were directed chiefly towards each other: it was a brother, that is, an Iſraelite, that was to be aſſiſted in all exigencies: "Thou ſhalt not ſee thy brother's ox "or his ſheep go aſtray, and hide thyſelf "from them: thou ſhalt in any caſe bring "them again unto thy brother *." But the precept is now, by a glorious extenſion, made univerſal as the benevolence of him on whom we all depend; for he has declared to us that we all are brethren, all equally his children, equally entitled to his care. Without diſtinction of perſons, therefore, he hath enjoined that we ſhould extend our kindneſs to all; that we ſhould "do good even to them "that hate us, bleſs them that curſe us, and

* Deut. xxii. 1.

"pray

" pray for them that deſpitefully uſe us, and " perſecute us *."

But why, it may be aſked, if God be indeed ſo merçifully diſpoſed towards mankind, that he works continually for their good, and would have all men labour with him to that end; why is it that, upon the face of the whole earth, evil ſo much prevails? that ſo many ſuffer and mourn under afflictive diſpenſations? whence the ſorrowful ſighing of the priſoners, and the groaning anguiſh of them that have no hope on earth?

Theſe evils are occaſioned, in the firſt place, by ſin. Men do not co-operate, as they ought, with God in diffuſing happineſs throughout the world; but rather employ their time and their powers in tormenting, than in doing good to each other: whence it happens, ſince the Almighty has committed the ordinary conduct of this world, in ſome meaſure, to the management of his imperfect creatures, that dreadful evils are daily occaſioned, which could not, without miraçulous interpoſition, be prevented. It is true, that God is not an indifferent ſpectator of theſe iniquities; that he will viſit for them hereafter, and bring

* Matt. v. 44.

evil

evil then in heavy meaſure upon the head of thoſe who now diſpenſe affliction and miſery to their brethren: but in the mean time the evil prevails, and the earth is full of rapine, fraud, cruelty, and every evil work, the neceſſary fruits of which are ſorrow and deſtruction.

Another cauſe of the prevalence of ſuffering in the world is the neceſſity for diſcipline. He who willeth only the good of all his creatures, frequently ſees it beſt to form their diſpoſitions to his will by the infliction of evil. The world in which he has placed us, the enjoyments which, on every ſide, his bounty has laviſhed round us, have frequently too ſtrong attraction: they bind us to them; they fix our minds to preſent objects, to the utter excluſion of future proſpects; and, by confining our attention wholly to the ſtate of things in this world, tend to diſqualify us totally for any other. In this caſe the mercy, and not the ſeverity, of God interpoſes; he takes from us thoſe things in which we too fondly delight, that we may be conſtrained to think of higher objects. By ſalutary infliction he rouſes us from our lethargic forgetfulneſs, and, like a wiſe phyſician, out of tranſient

tranſient ſuffering, produces laſting activity, and ſound health. There are few minds of ſuch ſtrength as to bear, without being corrupted, a ſtate of unvaried felicity. Our ideas being all drawn from experience, it is very difficult for thoſe who have not known affliction to eſtimate its preſſure, or to feel ſufficient compaſſion for thoſe who ſuffer by it. It is an obſervation confirmed by daily experience, that no hearts are ſo perfect as thoſe which have been early diſciplined in the rugged ſchool of adverſity: whereas they who have enjoyed uninterrupted proſperity are too often unfeeling towards men, and full of ſtubborn arrogance towards God himſelf. "Give me not riches," ſaid a man whoſe wiſdom ranks with that of Solomon, "leſt "I be full, and deny thee; and ſay, who is "the Lord*?"—Leſt we ſhould repine under the diſcipline thus neceſſary to bring our ſouls to the perfection of which they are capable, an example is ſet before us which muſt do away every pretence for murmuring: ſince He, the Author and Finiſher of our Faith, who was without ſpot or blemiſh of ſin, conſented for our ſakes to be tried, even

* Prov. xxx. 9.

as

as we are, and to have his human nature, in like manner, rendered perfect through ſufferings.

In every ſituation this perſuaſion ſhould inſeparably attend us, that God inflicts not evil but for the ſake of ſome more important good, moſt clearly diſcerned by him, though hidden, perhaps, from our imperfect ſight. To him, therefore, we may fly in every ſorrow and diſtreſs, as to a father who chaſtens only out of love, and who will hereafter, if we be found deſerving, wipe away our tears, and repay them with everlaſting bliſs. There is no one who ſuffers, that may not make this uſe of his affliction. Repentance and amendment will open to every ſinner the gates of mercy.

Nor ſhould this caution eſcape us, that the infliction of evil for the ſake of producing diſtant good, is a ſacred prerogative of the Almighty, which can very ſeldom, and only when the conſequences are immediate and indubitable, be exerciſed by man. Among men, to do evil that good may come is generally the falſe profeſſion of thoſe who are glad, under any pretence, to do evil. To do good, and only good, is the office and

glory

glory of a Chriſtian; to "do good to all men, "but eſpecially to thoſe which are of the "houſhold of faith." This is the ſecureſt way by which we can imitate our heavenly Father: this conduct, if we perſiſt in it, will be hereafter a crown of glory upon our heads, and our certain paſſport to everlaſting happineſs.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE X.

AGAINST CONCEALING OUR RELIGION.

2 TIM. i. 8. part of.

Be not thou therefore aſhamed of the teſtimony of our Lord.

THIS is the advice of an Apoſtle to one almoſt an Apoſtle, his adopted Son, and fellow-labourer in the Goſpel.—The attendant arguments and cautions are, in ſome degree, peculiar to the ſituation of the perſons then correſponding, in ſome alſo applicable to all Chriſtians. The ſolemn warning "not to be aſhamed of the teſtimony of "our Lord," is what we all ſhould feel as urged upon ourſelves: as a call to vigilance at all events, as a reproach if we have ever been aſhamed of that which ought to be our glory.

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The whole paſſage ſtands thus. "Where-
"fore I put thee in remembrance that thou
"ſtir up the gift of God which is in thee,
"by the putting on of my hands. For God
"hath not given us the ſpirit of fear; but
"of power, and of love, and of a ſound
"mind. Be not thou therefore aſhamed of
"the teſtimony of our Lord, nor of me his
"priſoner, but be partaker of the afflictions
"of the Goſpel, according to the power of
"God, who hath ſaved us, and called us
"with an holy calling." 6—9.

In ſeparating the parts of this exhortation for our uſe, we have firſt to remark the very extraordinary circumſtances of the perſons between whom it paſſed. Paul in priſon and in bonds at Rome, in daily expectation of a violent death *, invites a man at large, and hitherto in ſecurity, not to any worldly advantages, not to power, wealth, honour, or any thing eſteemed deſirable, but to a participation of the ſame apparent diſgraces, and the ſame very real afflictions. The invitation in itſelf is extraordinary, but it is ſtill more ſo, that *it was accepted* in its fulleſt extent: a fact for which it is not eaſy to account without admitting

* See iv. 6.

ſome

ſome ſuppoſitions deciſive in favour of Chriſtianity; and an argument, which, though not new, I think well worth recalling briefly to your mind, becauſe of its great ſtrength. It will hardly be ſuppoſed, that in thoſe days men were, contrary to their nature, fond of pain, diſgrace, and death, or that theſe things could operate as inducements; and if this cannot be imagined, we muſt conſider what other motives could poſſibly operate to produce this wonderful effect. Two, that are ſufficiently adequate to that purpoſe, are ſuggeſted by the paſſage itſelf, which, if they are admitted, remove all difficulty, and, at the ſame time, confirm, beyond all controverſy, the truth of this Revelation; if they are rejected, I know not what can poſſibly be ſubſtituted for them.—St. Paul ſpeaks of ſome divine gift attended with power; and of being called and ſaved, in a manner which of neceſſity implies ſome mighty bleſſing. The knowledge that he had theſe powers, and the hope of this ſalvation, might ſurely operate with Timothy to make him do what Paul, for ſimilar reaſons, had done; but if he knew he had received no gift, and ſaw no ſolid ground for hopes beyond the grave, he muſt,

in the firſt place, have taken great offence at the glaring falſehood thus aſſerted to him, and could have found no counterbalance for the evils he was called upon to bear. We may ſafely aſſert, from all we know of human nature, that to have acceded to the invitation on thoſe terms, is not in man.

To us, however, that part of the call which ſuppoſes a miraculous power received, is not applicable; nor are we, on the other hand, invited to partake afflictions like thoſe of the Apoſtles. We cannot ſay that God has given to us the Spirit of Power; but thus much of the paſſage we may perfectly adopt, "God hath not given us the ſpirit of fear; "but of—love, and of a ſound mind."—To you I am authorized to ſay, "Be not aſhamed "of the teſtimony of the Lord."

In different times there is a call for various gifts, and a neceſſity for different cautions. At former periods it has been required that men ſhould be cautioned againſt Superſtition, Bigotry, a perſecuting Spirit, Hypocriſy, and other religious vices, now almoſt extinct: at preſent there is no more preſſing danger, among thoſe who are believers, than leſt they

ſhould be aſhamed of owning all the truths that they believe.

Many cauſes have co-operated to produce this falſe, and ſinful ſhame. Cauſes, however, which though they may explain, cannot in the leaſt degree excuſe it. Sinful, and moſt ſhameful, it muſt always be to be aſhamed of Chriſt: to put our truſt in him in ſecret, and not confeſs him openly: to ſeek ſalvation by clandeſtine methods; and hold the beſt opinions as if they were the worſt. Sinful muſt this method always be, and obnoxious to the juſt retaliation which our Saviour has denounced, the return of ſhame and diſavowal on his part, when we ſhall have moſt need to be acknowledged by him. "Whoſoever ſhall "deny me before Men, him will I alſo deny "before my Father which is in heaven *" "Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of "my words, in this adulterous and ſinful ge-"neration," (titles, alas! too applicable to every age that has ſucceeded) "of him alſo "ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when "he cometh in the glory of his Father †." Let guilt or folly be aſhamed, but let not that

* Matt. x. 33. † Mark viii. 38.

be the ſubject of ſhame, which is "the Power "of God unto Salvation *."

How it has ariſen among us, that ſuch a ſhame can poſſibly exiſt, it may, perhaps, be uſeful to explain. We ſhall know the better where to find, and how to counteract it.

While the Goſpel, and they who ventured to receive it, were deſpiſed and perſecuted, it required, undoubtedly, a mind ſuperior to the fear of men, and that falſe ſhame which their reproach is apt to raiſe, to declare a full aſſent to it. From the time when it began to be eſteemed, protected, patronized, eſtabliſhed by the great and powerful in the world, the cauſes of this ſhame were leſſened, and at times entirely annihilated. Hypocriſy then took its turn; and wherever there was credit and reſpect annexed to faith in Chriſt, there was more fear that ſome ſhould boaſt of that attachment they did not feel, than that any ſhould deſire to hide this merit in concealment. With a wonderful perverſeneſs of ingenuity, men contrive, from all imaginable circumſtances, to extract the means of ſinning. In our own country, from Superſtition men paſſed to Reformation;—Reformation rekindled Zeal, and, for a time, a

* Rom. i. 16.

true

true and rational Zeal; Religion became the boaſt of the wiſe and learned, and, of courſe, the pretence of thoſe who would, at any price, gain admiration.—From this, the ſtep was eaſy to Fanaticiſm, and pretences to a ſuperſtitious purity ſo extravagant and ſo abſurd, that, when the fit was over, true zeal and real holineſs unhappily partook of that redundant ridicule, and that juſt contempt, which fell on ſuch hypocriſy and thoſe who practiſed it.—The fear of one extreme too frequently brings on the other. From this and various conſpiring cauſes, a period of profligacy ſucceeded to fanaticiſm: Virtue and Religion became unfaſhionable; Vice obtained a ſpurious credit; 'till, by an inverted hypocriſy, men counterfeited guilt, and claimed more ſins than they committed.

Happily, this great depravity was not general, it was confined to thoſe who affected faſhionable diſtinction, who, though they do great harm by their example, do it, in ſome meaſure, in proportion to the number of their imitators, which is not very great. It remained for falſe Philoſophy, and pretended accuracy of Reaſon, to extend a thouſandfold, what the corruption of a few could only

begin. Torrents of ridicule vented againſt every ſerious practice, were ſucceeded by ſpecious, though unſound reaſons againſt the truth of Chriſtianity, not, however, omitting that ridicule which had been found ſo very powerful. It was neceſſary, perhaps, that theſe things ſhould have proceeded in this order, to give them full effect; if the abſurdity of fanaticiſm had not attached ſome ridicule even to true Religion, which the undiſcerning might confound with it; if the deformity of vice had not been veiled by faſhion, and the virtuous plunged in falſe diſgrace, it would have been, at leaſt, leſs practicable, to treat a ſacred ſubject with buffoonery, and make a jeſt the ſubſtitute for argument, againſt Religion. Men would have ſhrunk, inſtead of laughing, at the ſcoffs of infidelity, and contempt would have been directed to its proper object; to him, who on theſe topics could be ludicrous.—This ſafeguard, however, was gone: and ſuch is the infirmity of man, that they who would reſiſt perſecution, will often ſtand in awe of ridicule. The enemy felt his advantage; cavils, doubts, and ſneers were multiplied againſt the Chriſtian and his faith, the infidel aſſumed that air of ſuperiority which ridicule ſo greatly favours;

favours; till the ſerious friend to Religion, between the fear of being or of ſeeming fanatical, and the dread of an unjuſt contempt, began to wear his faith more covertly; to laugh ſometimes with thoſe who laughed, at what he thought moſt ſolemn; and to ſatisfy himſelf with being pious in the ſight of God, without obtruding his opinions on the notice of mankind.

This conduct cannot ever be entirely juſtified; though it may ſometimes be true that, where we find men obſtinately bent to ſcoff, it may be charitable not to give them, in that temper, new occaſions to harden their own hearts in ſin, and repeat the follies that confirm them in their unbelief. But if in one caſe this be prudence, in every other it is worldly fear, and ought by no means to prevail.

To this falſe ſhame, mingled perhaps with ſome doubts, amidſt the number that are circulated, and an indolence almoſt as culpable as either, muſt be attributed the preſent decline, in appearance at leaſt, of Chriſtian zeal throughout this Chriſtian country.

The time, however, hath at length arrived when it can no longer be allowable, on any

plea, to temporize in our religious conduct. The confident boldneſs of unbelief, the reſerve and over-modeſty of Chriſtians, have brought things to that paſs, that every effort is now demanded which may, by any innocent means, recall the livelineſs of Chriſtian feelings, and the activity of honeſt Zeal. Infidelity, encouraged by its triumphs in a neighbouring country, will probably attempt new conqueſts among us: and with all the advantages that we have, of a more pure form of Chriſtianity, and certainly a much more general attachment to it, this is not a time for the friends of true Religion to be remiſs in any thing. For ſome conſiderable period, from the cauſes above-mentioned, it has been too much the practice, whatever character men might in other points deſire to eſtabliſh, to throw a kind of veil over their Religion. I do not mean, heaven forbid! that they would go the length of denying it, or of neglecting the moſt general duties of it; but that the character *they did not wiſh to eſtabliſh* was that of Religious Men. In this matter they wiſhed to keep their account with God alone: the text that bids them in their chief religious duties appeal to him only who ſeeth in ſecret, they were willing

moſt

moſt literally to obey: while the precept, by no means incompatible with it, and certainly of equal authority, of letting their light ſhine before men for their general edification and example, and for the glory of God, was paſſed by with little notice.

This, however, will be readily allowed by all who think upon theſe ſubjects ſeriouſly, that whatever palliation for ſuch conduct might be found in other circumſtances, it is proper in theſe times that we ſhould, by all imaginable means, declare before mankind, that we are not aſhamed of Chriſt; that we are not among the numbers fatally corrupted by the follies of the world, or favourers of infidelity. The contraſt ſhould be made as ſtrong as poſſible between the man who follows the true law of Revelation, and him who has adopted in its place the weak inventions of vain men: and every ſelfiſh conſideration ſhould give way to the benevolent deſire of leading many to Salvation, and the pious deſire of performing the will of God, and extending his Glory. "God hath not given us the ſpirit of fear, "but of love, and of a ſound mind."

The remainder of this diſcourſe may, perhaps, be beſt employed upon two principal con-

conſiderations. 1ſt. What are the uſual cauſes that prevent believers in this age from giving ſuch an open example of Religion as they ought; and, 2dly, What would be the happy conſequences of relinquiſhing this timid conduct?—In conſidering the cauſes, I ſhall of courſe enquire what weight they ought to have.

I. The firſt cauſe that occurs to me, is the fear of falling under the imputation or the ſuſpicion of hypocriſy: a vice ſo juſtly odious, and ſo expoſed among us formerly, by the exceſs to which the practice of it went, that to be reputed guilty of it, is with juſtice deemed a ſerious evil. To this apprehenſion, however, may fairly be oppoſed the conſideration that, in important matters, to conceal the truth for fear of groundleſs imputations, is neither manly nor entirely honeſt. Nor is the accuſation of Hypocriſy ſuch a one as can long maintain its ground againſt a ſteady perſeverance in well doing; becauſe, between the man who uniformly regulates his life by conſcientious and religious motives, and him who only takes Religion for a maſk, the world muſt ſoon be able to diſtinguiſh. It is ſufficient, for this purpoſe, to compare their profeſſions with their conduct. We may obſerve

ſerve alſo that, in ſome reſpects, the caution muſt be vain, ſince unbelievers cenſure all as hypocrites or fools who do not join with them in openly rejecting Revelation; and beſides this general reproach, from which certainly they cannot mean to fly, there can be little of this imputation to fear: for when no credit nor advantage among men can be obtained by the appearance of Religion, the temptation to aſſume it falſely is not ſtrong enough to raiſe a probable ſuſpicion. On all accounts, therefore, we may conclude that a dread of the falſe ſuſpicion, or imputation of hypocriſy, is by no means an admiſſible excuſe for any kind of concealments, and that to be actuated by it is mean, weak, and contemptible.

Some, however, fear not merely a groundleſs imputation, but leſt they ſhould in fact fall into oſtentation. They dread leſt they ſhould have a Phariſaical and outward piety, and thus fall under thoſe juſt cenſures which our Saviour has pronounced againſt ſuch perſons. This fear is doubtleſs founded in good principle, but accompanied by ſtrange unmanly weakneſs. The queſtion whether he profeſſes his attachment to Religion with a

view

view to his own glory, or to that of God; for his own advantage, or for the edification of others, is one which every man may ſettle perfectly within himſelf. To his own conſcience let him appeal. Let him, with caution and ſincerity, in the ſight of God deſcend into his heart, and if he there find no accuſer, he may conſide that he will meet with none in heaven. In this, as in many other matters, we can act only according to our beſt knowledge, and moſt pure intention, and for the reſt muſt leave it to the juſtice of that heavenly Judge who knows and loves us moſt.

Some, perhaps, ſtand in fear of that ſtrict reſponſibility which they would bring upon themſelves by ſtrong profeſſions of religious principles. Their conduct would undoubtedly be ſcrutinized by men, with more ſeverity than that of others. Every inſtance of guilt would not only involve themſelves in deep diſgrace, but alſo would, in ſome degree, affect the cauſe of piety. But to avoid all this, what is it, but to favour your own frailty, and contrive conveniencies for ſinning?—and, after all, a reſponſibility remains which cannot be ſo eaſily removed. If they profeſs to God that they believe his holy word, and love his holy

Religion,

Religion, however ſecretly they may declare it, will not he require it openly? Will not he compare, more accurately ſtill than men, their conduct with their profeſſions, ſecret or avowed? and will not he, which is much worſe than any worldly cenſure, puniſh them for inſincerity and falſehood? Theſe things require no argument: to ſuggeſt them is ſufficient. Want of thought, not want of comprehenſion, muſt prevent men from perceiving them.

Laſtly, there are ſome who fear the ſcoffs of impious men, and the imputation of credulity. The abſurdity of this fear may very eaſily be ſhown. They who believe not, muſt certainly ſuppoſe us credulous, or they would alſo believe; we, on the other hand, conſider them as prejudiced againſt the truth: and thus far the account is balanced. That the one imputation is more generally dreaded than the other, is owing to the falſe eſtimates of men, who had rather be thought impious than weak. But, be this as it may, in matters that depend on evidence we muſt believe according to our powers of judging. To that which ſeems irrefragable we muſt yield aſſent, if we are honeſt; to do ſo, is a matter not of choice,

but

but conſcience; and if we fear what men may ſay of our belief, we have more cauſe to dread what our own hearts would teſtify againſt us, or a juſt God decree, if we rejected that which ſeemed to our beſt judgment to demand attention and aſſent. If on theſe juſt grounds we have aſſented, ſhould the arrogant aſſumption of ſuperior judgment uſed by unbelievers, be ſuffered to abaſh us? Shall we be aſhamed of Chriſt, becauſe the empty pride of man with inſolence rejects him? It will not bear a doubt; and, to have put theſe queſtions to ourſelves with ſeriouſneſs, is to have decided.

If we go further, and examine the ſubſtance of that accuſation of Credulity, to what does it amount? Let us recollect the groundwork of our faith, and ſee how far it can give weight to ſuch a charge. "We believe "that men without a motive would not be "deceivers: that, particularly, they would "not plot together to bring themſelves to "miſery: or that, if they found that fruit "ſpring unexpectedly from their deſigns, "they would relinquiſh them. All, it is pro-"bable, would do ſo; or, if not all, yet ſurely "ſome among a multitude. We believe

"that

"that the ſame men could not be groſs im-
"poſtors, and the framers of the moſt per-
"fect moral ſyſtem that ever was contrived;
"ignorant, and the teachers of the higheſt
"wiſdom; authors of diſcoveries original,
"yet perfect. We believe that books ſup-
"ported by collateral teſtimony, and frequent
"citation from the very time of their appear-
"ance cannot fail to be authentic: and having
"firſt believed theſe points, which we know
"not how to controvert, we give to the evi-
"dence of the men, and to the doctrines of
"the books, that aſſent which theſe conſi-
"derations, and ſuch others of internal evi-
"dence as are extremely obvious, muſt de-
"mand." Such are the foundations of our faith, the ſources from which all that we believe of Revelation is derived.—And if ſuch they be, why ſhould we be moved by the vain word credulity? The Mathematician, when from proof he has aſſented to ſuch things as ſeem to ignorance impoſſible, laughs at thoſe who call him credulous. The Chriſtian may laugh alſo; at leaſt he has a ſimilar right to do ſo, proportioned to the force of moral proof compared with demonſtration, could he laugh

at that infatuation which, he fears, muſt end in miſery.

II. Such, and ſo futile, being the cauſes which lead believers to with-hold that brightneſs of example they are bound to give, the advantage of diſmiſſing that timidity may eaſily be traced. There are many admirable practices diſuſed, through fear of what the world might ſay or think concerning them. Some injunctions of the Church, and ſome domeſtic duties are, for this very cauſe, neglected. I might inſtance in the general inattention to the preſent ſeaſon *, and the ſolemn week that cloſes it, as a period of religious recollection and humiliation. It is impoſſible that many ſhould not feel how right and wiſe it is at ſuch ſtated times to abſtain from ſome indulgences, and give ſome hours to ſerioufneſs, to penitence, and prayer. Yet becauſe they fear the world, becauſe they would not be, or ſeem, what few have any chance of being, righteous over-much, they yield not to theſe warnings of the conſcience. The authority of the Church to enjoin, they do not venture to deny; but the authority of the world to abrogate, is yet more ſacred with them.

* Lent.

Among

Among the private duties neglected from the ſame cauſe, that of family prayer is moſt to be regretted. The authority of ſituation, the influence of example, the empire of attachment, and the weight of ſuperior knowledge, can by no means be employed ſo advantageouſly by the maſter of a family, as by thus diſplaying to his children and domeſtics his own attachment to Religion, his dutiful obedience to his God. Exhortation without example does little. A tone, a geſture, that, in the act of worſhip, marks involuntary fervour, and ſincere religious feeling, may ſometimes ſink more deeply, and leave impreſſions of more force, and durable effect, than volumes of morality. It is true, that before a man can thus do good to others, he muſt be fixed and ſteady in himſelf: he muſt have riſen above falſe ſhame, and have learnt to be as willing to appear religious as to be ſo: he muſt be in the habit of admitting ſerious thought, and putting ſome conſtraint upon himſelf, for the ſake of ſerious duties: he muſt be willing to be tried by theſe appearances, and to make his life conſiſtent with them. But is not this the very character that a wiſe and virtuous man ſhould ſeek?—Would to heaven

that all they who think thus ſeriouſly, would reaſon thus conſiſtently, and contribute all that aid they might, and ought, to ſpread true Piety among us!

The ſtate of Religion in this country, though not what we might wiſh it, is, I truſt, very far from being deſperate. There are not wanting men of ſerious piety and ſteady faith: a little more deciſion of conduct for the ſake of example, a little more firmneſs in deſpiſing idle cavil and ridicule, would, I think, produce an evident change, which would no leſs ſurpriſe than abaſh the enemies of truth. That this ſuppoſition may be juſt, and this expectation realized, is my wiſh and prayer. Nor will I now detain you longer than to hope that you will all revolve theſe things as ſeriouſly as I have ſtated them.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XI.

ON LETTER AND SPIRIT.

2 Cor. iii. part of ver. 6.

For the letter killeth, but the ſpirit giveth life.

THIS is one of thoſe texts of St. Paul which is liable to miſconſtruction, becauſe, when removed from its place in his epiſtle, and from the reaſoning with which it is connected, it ſeems to convey an aſſertion very different from that which was intended. When it is ſaid generally, and without limitation, on apoſtolical authority, that "the letter killeth, but the ſpirit giveth life," the hearer may perhaps too haſtily conclude that it is ſo ſaid of all ſcripture, and has reference to the interpretation of it; in which we are thereby taught to ſeek always for ſome higher and more ſpiritual ſenſe than the letter, or literal acceptation of it, will preſent.

Such a conception of this text, as it leads directly to the fantaſtic reveries, and dangerous follies of myſtical divinity, ought very carefully to be avoided; and though the right interpretation be neither new, nor lies very deep, being eaſily diſcovered by inſpection of the chapter to which the text belongs, it may be uſeful to take notice of it. We may thus prevent ſome perſons from being miſled by the unexpected allegation of ſo ſpecious an authority; may guard againſt any offence which might be taken at the apoſtle, on the ſuppoſition that he encouraged ſuch imaginations; and, finally, may afford an example of the circumſpect and cautious manner, in which it is neceſſary to interpret the ſcriptures, and eſpecially the epiſtles of St. Paul, "in which "there are," as the church was long ago warned by his fellow-labourer, St. Peter, "things hard to be underſtood, which they "that are unlearned and unſtable wreſt, as "they do alſo the other ſcriptures, unto "their own deſtruction *."

A very moderate attention to this paſſage, as it ſtands in the epiſtle, will enable any intelligent reader to give it the proper inter-

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

pretation; for it is ſufficiently evident, that no method whatever of interpreting ſcripture is there ſpoken of; but that in vindicating his own dignity, as a preacher of the new covenant, St. Paul diſtinguiſhes the Law by the name of the Letter, the Goſpel by that of the Spirit. The *Law* he calls the *Letter*, becauſe its precepts were preternaturally engraved in viſible letters; the *Goſpel* he names the *Spirit*, becauſe the peculiar characteriſtic of it was, that it was to be engraven ſpiritually on the hearts and in the ſouls of men, by an interpoſition of divine power altogether as preternatural as that which wrote the decalogue on tables of ſtone. This diſtinction the prophet Jeremiah had long before been taught by inſpiration to declare: "Behold the days come, ſaith the Lord, "that I will make a new covenant with "the houſe of Iſrael, and with the houſe "of Judah; not according to the covenant "that I made with their fathers"—that is, the covenant delivered on mount Sinai, written and engraved on ſtones—"but," (continues the prophet) "I will put my law "in their inward parts, and write it in

" their hearts *." Of this prediction the apoſtle's mind appears to have been full when he wrote this chapter to the Corinthians, for he ſpeaks expreſsly of the Goſpel, as being written within them by means of his preaching; " not with ink, but with the Spirit of " the living God; not in tables of ſtone, but " in fleſhy tables of the heart †:" and then, purſuing his object of vindicating his own miniſtry, " Our ſuffering," ſays he, " is of " God; who alſo hath made us miniſters of " the New Teſtament, (that is) not of the " *letter*, but of the *Spirit* (not of the old " law, but of the new); for the *letter* (the " Moſaic covenant) killeth; but the *Spirit* " (the Grace of the Goſpel) giveth life."—He proceeds, ſtill preſerving the ſame idea, " But if the *miniſtration of death*, written " and engraven in ſtones (namely, that letter " which killeth), was glorious—how ſhall " not the miniſtry of the Spirit (that is, " the miniſtration of the Goſpel) be rather " glorious?"—And again, in other words, " For if the miniſtration of condemnation " (the law) be glory, much more doth the

* Jer. xxxi. 31, &c. † Ver. 3.

" mini-

"miniſtration of righteouſneſs," or juſtification, (namely, the Goſpel) "exceed in "glory*:"—with yet more; exactly to the ſame effect. All this is perfectly conſiſtent; it agrees preciſely with the doctrine which the apoſtle uniformly inculcates, and the juſt preference he always gives, to the ſecond over the firſt diſpenſation; maintaining that the one concluded all men under guilt and condemnation, there being no adequate ſatisfaction for ſin under the Law; while the other removed the hand-writing of ordinances that was againſt us, and opened to all men the treaſures of free Grace and Redemption.

The names of *Letter* and *Spirit* were more particularly applicable to the Law and the Goſpel reſpectively, as the one contained the exalted and ſpiritual meaning of the other: whatever was laid down in the Moſaic ordinances, of a worldly and imperfect nature, was a type only, and a ſenſible repreſentation, of that which, in a higher and more perfect ſenſe, was to take place under the diſpenſation of Chriſt.

Thus does common ſenſe, guided by the evident deſign of the apoſtle, direct us to in-

* Ver. 6—10.

terpret that paſſage, which, ſeparately taken, ſeems to have a general reference to the interpretation of ſcripture; and is but too likely to be applied, in juſtification of their dangerous errors, by thoſe who delight in diſcovering ſpiritual and hidden ſenſes in the plaineſt paſſages of the ſacred books.—"The *Letter*," they tell us, "killeth;"—true, the Letter of the firſt Law; but, in the Goſpel, the Letter as well as the Spirit giveth Life, Redemption, and Mercy; and to apply to this covenant what was properly ſaid of the other, is to deny and to deſpiſe the Grace of God; who, in this his better covenant, has ſuffered nothing to appear that illuſtrates not the riches and abundance of his mercy; not a letter to be written, that tends not to the purpoſes of the whole benevolent ſyſtem. Ingratitude or weakneſs cannot well more groſsly betray themſelves, than by aſſerting that *the Letter killeth*, in a diſpenſation, the whole of which is ſpiritual, and was given expreſsly to lead us, notwithſtanding our manifeſt unworthineſs, to immortal life and bleſſedneſs.

To the many ſimilar paſſages that occur in the writings of the ſame apoſtle, we muſt apply a like interpretation, and beware of ſuffering

ſuffering ourſelves to imagine that he any where exhorts us to overlook the literal meaning of the Goſpel, and wander in purſuit of ſome recondite, myſtical ſenſe.

When he ſays, in his epiſtle to the Romans, "that we ſhould ſerve in *newneſs* of *Spirit*, "and not in the *oldneſs* of the *Letter*," it is certain he means, conformably to what has now been explained, that we ſhould ſerve according to the *Goſpel diſpenſation*, and not according to that given to the Jews. This is evident, indeed, even from that paſſage itſelf, as well as from the compariſon of it with my text, for the reaſon there given why we ſhould ſo ſerve, is, becauſe "we are delivered "from *the law—that* being dead (abrogated, "or done away), to which before we were "held *." When he ſays, in an earlier paſſage of the ſame epiſtle, that "*he* is a "Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumci-"ſion is of the heart, in *the Spirit*, and not "in the *Letter* †;" his intention is to declare, that the ceremonial circumciſion, according to the letter of the ancient law, had given place to that which was the ſpirit of the inſtitution, namely, that circumciſion of

* Rom. vii. 6. † Rom. ii. 29.

the

the heart, or inward purity, which, under the Goſpel, was required inſtead of outward ablution; and that therefore he only was a Jew, according to the improved ſpirit of Judaiſm, who, forſaking the letter of his law, attached himſelf to the evangelical interpretation, now delivered by Chriſt and his apoſtles. The Goſpel is the ſpirit of the Law; and in this ſenſe it was that our Saviour, though his revelation was deſigned to put an end to the inſtitutions of the former, declared himſelf come "not to deſtroy the law and the prophets, "but to fulfil them *."

Theſe diſtinctions between the old and new covenants are ſo eſſential to the underſtanding of our religion, that we find St. Paul, throughout his epiſtles, continually aſſerting, enforcing, and explaining them; replying to the objections of Jews and others; and, by various means of illuſtration, ſetting forth the ſuperior advantages of the Chriſtian diſpenſation.

The queſtions that ariſe out of this ſubject are ſuch as we could not poſſibly have ſolved without the aid of the apoſtle, and therefore we muſt be careful to attend to his explana-

* Matt. v. 17.

tions,

tions, leſt we reaſon amiſs, and pervert the knowledge that is given us.

It is very natural to enquire to what end a diſpenſation ſhould have been given which led only to condemnation? This queſtion the the apoſtle takes up in the third chapter to the Galatians: "*Wherefore then ſerveth the* "*law?*" The reply is, "It was added be- "cauſe of tranſgreſſions:"—that is, it was added to ſhow the heinouſneſs of tranſgreſſions, and their deſtructive, deadly nature. Had no revelation ever been promulgated, but that which was a ſyſtem of mere mercy, it might have been ſuppoſed that ſin was not ſo highly abominable in the ſight of God, as it truly is; and as it ought by all means to be ſhown to every moral agent. Had our Supreme Judge appeared to us only as ſeeking to forgive offences, his enmity againſt them could not have been diſcovered; and it would rather have been concluded that he thought lightly of ſin, than that there was danger of incurring by it his ſevereſt indignation and judgments. The Law was therefore made a ſyſtem of ſeverity, that it might be ſeen what ſin deſerves; death and curſes were denounced for every tranſgreſſion: and the

expiations

expiations appointed under it referred only to the temporal ſtate of the offender, and prevented him from being cut off from the congregation, but could not purify the ſoul, it being impoſſible, as the ſame teacher declares, "that the blood of bulls and goats "ſhould waſh away ſin." In the mean time two moſt important points received a full illuſtration; the ſtrong hatred of God againſt ſin, exemplified in the ſevere and dreadful temporal chaſtiſements which fell upon the Jews for their diſobedience; and the unhappy tendency of our corrupt nature to fall into tranſgreſſion; both together fully evincing the great neceſſity of a Redeemer, who ſhould be able to purify our ſouls, as the bodies of men were purified by the imperfect expiations of the law, and avert from us thoſe much more dreadful puniſhments in another world, which the preſent inflictions upon the Jews muſt have taught us to apprehend. From teaching this great leſſon the Law is called by St. Paul "a ſchoolmaſter, to bring "us to Chriſt *;" for without it we ſurely could not have known ſo fully the neceſſity we had for Chriſt, nor have been ſo willing

* Gal. iii. 24.

to

to approach him. To the Jew then who enquires, "Was that which was good (name-"ly, the law) made death unto me?" the anſwer is, "God forbid. But ſin, that it "might appear ſin, working death in me by "that which is good; that ſin by the com-"mandment might become exceeding ſin-"ful*:" which, though obſcurely expreſſed, we may now underſtand to ſignify, "But it "was appointed to ſhow ſin in its true co-"lours, which, ſince by means of an inſtru-"ment ſo good in itſelf as the command-"ments of God, it could work death, muſt "of neceſſity be conſidered as very highly "atrocious."

Beſides this, if the Law had not been given, it might have appeared that man went aſtray only for want of ſome poſitive rule by which to guide him. He is left, it might have been ſaid, to diſcover his own duties under many difficulties and diſadvantages; would God but graciouſly condeſcend to inform him what ſervices he expects, he doubtleſs would moſt zealouſly perform a will to which he owes ſo abſolute obedience.

* Rom. vii. 13.

On

On trial it turns out otherwiſe:—with every poſſible conviction that God has ſpoken to him; with the traces of the divine hand-writing viſible before him; with miracles occaſional and perpetual, evincing the actual ſuperintendence of God in the polity of a whole nation, and the concerns of every individual; with prophets to inſtruct and warn; with bleſſings to encourage, and judgments to deter; Man, tried fully in the perſon of a ſtiff-necked Jew, continued obſtinately to diſobey; nor ceaſed till he had drawn upon himſelf the fulleſt meaſure of divine indignation.

From all this it appears that ſomething more than mere inſtruction, ſomething beyond the letter of a law, was neceſſary to man. Had the Goſpel contained no more than an additional collection of precepts, it would have occaſioned, probably, only an additional number of tranſgreſſions; for ſuch is the corruption of man's nature, that a command, inſtead of preventing any offence, ſometimes produces only a ſtronger inclination to offend.

Here then we arrive at the trueſt and ſublimeſt diſtinction between the two covenants: the former is called *the Letter*, becauſe it delivered

livered only the letter of precept, and left man by his natural ſtrength to perform what was enjoined; the latter is fitly and pre-eminently called *Spirit*, becauſe, beſides the commandments it delivers, there is alſo communicated in it a divine co-operation and aſſiſtance, to enable us to obey them. The law of Chriſt is not only written ſpiritually in the hearts of true believers, but it is written there by the Spirit of God himſelf. On this ground St. Paul was able to appeal to the actual knowledge of the firſt converts, who had ſenſibly experienced the effects of that communication which pre-eminently diſtinguiſhes the Goſpel from the Law: finding, for inſtance, the Galatians inclined to relapſe into the Moſaic ordinance, he boldly aſks, "This only would I learn of you, Received "ye the Spirit by the works of the Law, or "by the hearing of Faith?" and then, knowing what reply they muſt of neceſſity give, he urges them further, "Are ye ſo fooliſh? "having begun in the Spirit, are ye now "made perfect in the fleſh*?"—To this ſyſtem, therefore, this Holy Gift is peculiarly granted, and inſeparably attached, inſomuch

* Gal. iii. 2, 3.

that

that they who diligently ſeek it may ſurely be directed by it in the path that leads to ſalvation. By this, and by this only, the inability to fulfil obedience, which was made manifeſt by the giving of the Law, is totally removed; and Man is enabled to perform that acceptable ſervice, which by Nature he could not complete.—This is the Spirit which moſt truly *giveth life*, being the very Spirit of truth and immortality, which makes us "the children of God, and beareth wit-"neſs to him that we are ſo *."

This declaration of the difference between the firſt and ſecond covenant, and this preference of the latter, were very neceſſary in the time of St. Paul; becauſe there were at that period many converts who maintained that the obſervances of the Jewiſh Law were ſtill indiſpenſable, and that Chriſt could only be approached through the gate which Moſes had opened. In combating theſe opinions, the apoſtle was obliged to depreciate the Law in compariſon with the freer grace of the Goſpel; and for that purpoſe employed many expreſſions, which, ſince the extinction of thoſe errors, have been variouſly miſappre-

* Rom. viii. 14, 16.

hended,

hended, and very falſely applied. He called the Law a carnal ordinance, in oppoſition to the ſpiritual grace then revealed; a law of works—inſtead of faith; and even the *fleſh*, as oppoſed to the *ſpirit*: and at other times, as in the text I have been examining, *the Letter which killeth*, in contradiſtinction to *the Spirit*, *which giveth life*: its precepts he termed *beggarly elements*, and the obedience to them *ſervitude* and *bondage*. Theſe, and many ſimilar expreſſions, being no longer neceſſary to counteract any extravagant attachment to the Moſaic inſtitutions, have received ſeveral other applications, in no ſmall degree dangerous, and deſtructive of the purity of Religion: and there are not wanting teachers, who from ſuch words of St. Paul will argue againſt the law of *works*, as if by that expreſſion the apoſtle had meant the law of Chriſt himſelf, which commands us to perform good works. Others myſticize theſe paſſages, as was obſerved in the beginning of this diſcourſe, and extract from them an authority not to underſtand any thing according to its proper meaning. But in all ſuch paſſages it is neceſſary to conſider the times and circumſtances by which the admonitions were occaſioned, which are in

the epiſtles themſelves ſufficiently explained, if we read them with tolerable attention. We ſhould compare the writings of the apoſtle with themſelves; conſider the tendency of his argument; and ſtand eſpecially upon our guard in theſe reſpects whenever any extravagant and enthuſiaſtic doctrine is attempted to be ſupported by a paſſage of St. Paul's epiſtles, torn from its context. It is poſſible, as we ſee in this inſtance, for words to have a clear and undoubted meaning, very different from that which they appear to have upon a ſlight and partial conſideration.

Nor are we to imagine, from any thing now ſtated, that St. Paul undervalued the firſt covenant. He conſidered it as an important gift of God; in its due time, as a neceſſary inſtruction to prepare the way for the Goſpel; but removed, of courſe, as that which is imperfect muſt be, on the appearance of that more perfect plan to which it tended: and though there was under that Law no deliverance from condemnation, no remiſſion of offences, yet, according to his doctrine, they who lived under it were not without a remedy; for when at length the Redeemer appeared, he died not only for the remiſſion of

preſent

preſent and future ſins, but, as we are told in the epiſtle to the Hebrews, for "the Re-"demption alſo of the tranſgreſſions that "were under the firſt covenant *;" and, in fact, for the ſalvation of all ages, Chriſt being virtually ſacrificed from the foundation of the world.

The chief uſe that can now be made of theſe diſtinctions between the Law and the Goſpel, is to warn us, that every form of Chriſtianity muſt be corrupt and imperfect, which inculcates too ſtrong a regard for ceremonies and external obſervances: for this, if it does not bring us back exactly to the Moſaic elements, and the bondage from which Chriſt delivered his people, has an effect ſo ſimilar, as neceſſarily to be included under the ſame cenſure. Religion according to Goſpel is purely ſpiritual; nor can any ſervice be rendered acceptable under it, which is ſubſtituted in the place of purity of heart, or ſincere repentance for tranſgreſſion.

Nor muſt we forget, that, by the example of the Moſaic covenant, man was proved to be unable to ſecure himſelf from tranſgreſ-

* Heb. ix. 15.

ſion; and that there is therefore, under the more perfect covenant, an aſſiſting grace to which we muſt look, for which we muſt pray, and of which we muſt endeavour to make ourſelves deſerving. The Holy Spirit will not dwell in temples of corruption; but if we purify ourſelves by repentance and ſubſequent obedience, he will not diſdain that habitation, and then, as we are expreſsly aſſured, "if the Spirit of him that raiſed up "Jeſus from the dead dwell in us, he that "raiſed up Chriſt from the dead, will alſo "quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit "that dwelleth in us *."

Obſerving theſe things, we ought to feel a true and zealous gratitude to Almighty God, for having placed us under this covenant of inexhauſtible mercy: had we been otherwiſe ſituated, we might, indeed, have enjoyed the benefits of our Saviour's merits and interceſſion, which extend to all times and countries; but we could not have known our happineſs, nor have looked forward, as now we may, unleſs prevented by our ſins, with ſtrong confidence and lively expectation

* Rom. viii. 11.

towards

towards thoſe high and glorious bleſſings which the blood of Chriſt has purchaſed.

The renewal and confirmation of thoſe hopes is now offered, in almoſt the only poſitive rite which Chriſt has ordained *: let us not neglect the opportunity, but unite with lively zeal in the ſublime devotions of that holy inſtitution.

Now to God, &c.

* The Holy Sacrament.

DISCOURSE XII.

ON HOLDING FAST THE FAITH.

HEB. x. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promiſed.

THE faith of Chriſtians has been tried in various ways, and has itſelf borne different aſpects, according to the circumſtances of the times. That which was tried in the Apoſtles was, in the main, rather Conſtancy than Faith, according to the preſent acceptation of the word. That their faith, taken in the ſenſe of belief, ſhould have wavered, after having been once fixed, was almoſt impoſſible. They had ſeen and converſed with the Lord of Life, they had beheld his miracles, they had heard him ſpeak, as never Man ſpake, they had received him reſtored to them alive again from the dead;

and finally, they had been preſent when he was taken from them into heaven; had heard the voice of the Angel declaring that he ſhould come again, in due time, from that place; and had received the confirmation of all their hopes, and the renewal of all their recollections, in the promiſed Gift of the Holy Ghoſt.

In men ſo circumſtanced, the chief trial was, not whether they believed, what they could not but believe *, but, whether they could have ſufficient reſolution to abide the ſhame and the ſufferings of the preſent time, to give up the hopes and comforts of this life entirely, for the ſake of the promiſes of God, on which they were inſtructed to rely. Not very different was the ſtate of the firſt Converts, who, though they had not the actual teſtimony of their ſenſes for the diſcourſes, actions, and miracles of Jeſus, could not eaſily feel doubtful concerning the teſtimony

* It is not meant that the Apoſtles had no merit in believing. To have given up thoſe violent prejudices, which kept many of their countrymen in unbelief, and to have uſed a candid judgment on what they ſaw or heard, theſe were the merits of faith in the Apoſtles, which were not equal in them all, and of which Thomas appears to have poſſeſſed the ſmalleſt ſhare.

of

of thoſe holy men, who confirmed what they ſaid of his miracles, by miracles of their own; whoſe acts were regulated in conformity to his holy life, and whoſe diſcourſes were, like his, (though in an inferior degree) full of piety, of goodneſs, and of the Holy Ghoſt. To doubts, therefore, concerning the ſubſtance of their faith, theſe perſons could be little more liable than even the Apoſtles themſelves; they had, at leaſt, a degree of evidence the next in ſtrength to that, and ſufficient very abundantly, to eſtabliſh in their minds the indubitable certainty of that which they had heard. The faith of theſe men was alſo, in great meaſure, conſtancy; a mind above the fears and the temptations of the preſent life, and a full reliance on the performance of God's promiſes. To theſe, therefore, the apoſtolic writer in my text addreſſes this particular ſuggeſtion, that "he is faithful that promiſed;" uniting himſelf with them as reſting on the ſame reliance. "Let *us* hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering."

Thus far the Faith of men depended on an evidence which amounted almoſt to certainty: and their trials were ſuch as nothing

leſs

leſs than a moſt ſtrong and lively perſuaſion could have enabled them to encounter.

Beyond that period the Faith of men became *hiſtorical:* that is, it ceaſed to reſt upon actual knowledge, or the teſtimony of eye-witneſſes, but was derived, of neceſſity, into remoter channels of tradition, or conveyed in written narratives: and from that time to the preſent, excluding the collateral evidence of prophecy, ſuch has been the principal foundation of Chriſtian Faith.

Now the nature of Hiſtorical Faith is this. In its beginnings, when it is only by a ſingle ſtep removed from the teſtimony of eye-witneſſes, or the voice of immediate tradition, it is as firm as Knowledge itſelf. Facts of public notoriety, well authenticated by the firſt relators, or of a nature to be generally known at the time of their tranſaction, are no more the ſubject of doubt in the period immediately ſucceeding their occurrence, than at that moment itſelf. The remarkable events which took place in any country, one or two generations immediately preceding the actual period, are never called in queſtion. It would be reckoned madneſs in any one to doubt who reigned in this iſland within the preſent century,

or who were the leading perſonages of the times, and what their acts and characters. It is true, that in matters of intricacy, where various arts are practiſed, and the paſſions of mankind are violently engaged, time is generally neceſſary to ſeparate truth from falſe aſſertion, to detect concealed motives, and trace out the artifices by which men had either diſſembled their own acts, or miſrepreſented thoſe of others. But after ſuch deductions and alterations, when they happen to be neceſſary, or in other caſes, without them, the truth remains uncontroverted; and it muſt be ſome ſtrong intereſt, or ſome ſtrange perverſion of mind, by which any one is induced to doubt that which, under all ſuch circumſtances, had paſſed without ſuſpicion.—The facts of the Goſpel Hiſtory delivered originally by eye-witneſſes, and authenticated by ſome modes of teſtimony which facts can very ſeldom have, were long received implicitly, by all who had the candour to liſten to the narrative, and to weigh the teſtimonies. But there were alſo perſons who, for various reaſons, were ſet againſt the truth; by theſe, from the very beginning, every poſſible doubt was raiſed, every diſcuſſion provoked and entered

tered into; and the reſult was, that, by the conſtant defeat of its antagoniſts, the truth remained eſtabliſhed. In this ſtate the Goſpel has come down to us; as a hiſtory teſtified, in a manner moſt unparalleled, by thoſe who could not fail to know the truth; received moſt perfectly by multitudes, upon the teſtimony of the firſt witneſſes; and canvaſſed to the utmoſt by adverſaries, while all means of diſcovery muſt have been as yet acceſſible; and ſo canvaſſed, that the deepeſt intrigues muſt have been detected, and the cloſeſt falſehoods developed, had there been at the firſt any art employed to embelliſh, or to diſguiſe the truth. Such then is the nature of that hiſtory on which our faith is placed, that if there be a poſſibility for human teſtimony to eſtabliſh any thing on a footing equal to demonſtration, this is ſo eſtabliſhed; or whatever narrow line of ſeparation be ſuppoſed to form the boundary between certainty and irreſiſtible evidence, this at leaſt is carried to a perfect contact with that line, and reaches to the very extent of moral certitude.

Under theſe circumſtances, let us conſider to what kind of danger our Faith is now expoſed; and by what means we can beſt fulfil the

the precepts of the Apoſtle, and hold it faſt without wavering.

The preſent is an awful period for the Chriſtian world. Whether God, offended at the coldneſs of mens minds towards his religion, or at their warmth reſpecting the intereſts of this world, at their want of Chriſtian Virtues, or their abundance of unchriſtian Vices, hath determined to ſift the nations in his wrath, and to try to the very utmoſt every particle of faith remaining in them; or whether for any other wiſe but, as yet, inſcrutable purpoſe, he ſends forth his judgments into the earth; certain it is that he has ſounded an alarm, as with the trumpet of his exterminating Angel, at the blaſt of which every Chriſtian breaſt muſt thrill, and ſhould begin to collect its forces for a conteſt ſeverer, perhaps, than this theatre of human actions has produced for centuries. Infidelity, after long preluding with writings of all pernicious kinds, after labouring alſo to poiſon the ſources of hiſtory, philoſophy, and almoſt every human ſcience, has been permitted to go forth in arms, and ſovereign power, taking as her ally Perſecution, whom while ſhe feared ſhe had the art to decry;

and

and thoſe yet more irreſiſtible auxiliaries, inſolence and contempt, to whoſe inflictions ſhe devotes all thoſe who dare abide by that which they have learned of divine knowledge, and that faith on which their beſt and nobleſt hopes are founded. The country is not far diſtant, in which, as you all know, every kind of inſult and profanation has been offered to the very name of Religion; the places of worſhip ſhut, or opened only to receive the orgies of an heatheniſh fanaticiſm; where *human Reaſon*, or Licentiouſneſs under the falſe name of Liberty, and perſonified by ſome being as baſe as the occaſion, are the objects of an impious adoration: the very form and civil diviſions of time changed, for the purpoſe of obliterating that which carries with it a memorial of Creation and Redemption; for the ſake of leaving the Jews without a Sabbath, and the Chriſtians without a Lord's-Day. That ſevenfold diviſion of time, which all ages have known, and which true Religion has always eſtabliſhed, is therefore done away, to make room for a decimal computation, the periods of which are intended to commemorate crimes, and to be illuſtrated by blaſphemies and idolatries.

Beholding

Beholding theſe ſtrange ſcenes ſo near us, it is impoſſible not to aſk ourſelves, to what can all this tend? and among the various conjectures to which anxious enquiry, unknowing where to reſt, gives riſe, this muſt infallibly be one, that it may be intended for the trial of the faithful.—How far the evil may be permitted to ſpread, or to what exceſſes it may proceed, it is beyond the power of ſagacity to gueſs; but a prudent Chriſtian will collect his ſtrength before the hour of danger, and call to mind the grounds of his reliance, before he is compelled to act for the deciſion of his fate, in this world and the next.

From what we cannot fail to know of human nature, we may be very fully aſſured, that Infidelity, armed with authority, will ſoon gain many proſelytes: and the contemptuous air of ſuperior Wiſdom ſhe aſſumes will, in no ſmall degree, facilitate the work. Men who could have borne perſecution, cannot always bear to be deſpiſed; and though it be the groſſeſt mark of ignorance to deny at large that which in detail is capable of the ſoundeſt proofs, yet he who inſolently ſays that it is fooliſh to believe, will find too many

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ſo unwiſe as to ſuppoſe that he is more enlightened than themſelves. Nor is it by any means a trifling evil that the aſſertion by which Religion is denied is brief, and eaſily pronounced; while the proofs by which it is eſtabliſhed are various, intricate, and only to be fully known by long inveſtigation.

With reſpect to the proofs of Religion mankind are variouſly ſituated. Some have leiſure, knowledge, and abilities to purſue them to the utmoſt. Others again, without being equal to ſo much, are capable at leaſt of knowing what others have performed, and of underſtanding what they are told as the reſult of ſuch enquiries. While a third claſs have little more on which they can depend than the evidence of prevalent opinion, and the authority of their appointed teachers.

To the believers in each of theſe claſſes what can we ſay? but, *whether infidelity prevail not, or whether it prevail*; whether it proceed by ſecret machinations or by open and authoritative attack, "Hold faſt the profeſſion of your faith, without wavering."

The firſt of theſe claſſes, they who have leiſure and abilities to examine the evidences of faith, have either made this examination already,

already, or they have not. In the former caſe, if they be found to waver, they are without excuſe. In giving up their own ſure knowledge to the ignorance and inſolence of others, they could be actuated only by fear or intereſt, or the baſeſt worldly paſſions, and would reſemble thoſe who, in the early periods of Chriſtianity, apoſtatized againſt their own conviction, or the teſtimony of their ſenſes.—If they have not yet examined, now is the time for the adviſer to ſay to them, make your examination; prepare yourſelves before the day of trial; for if it ſhould come on, and at that period you ſhould fail, from the want of ſuch knowledge as your own neglect alone occaſioned you to want, you will have betrayed yourſelves, you will have gone into the battle without an armour, which yet lay ready for your uſe, and, if you periſh, may be numbered with the ſelf-deſtroyers.—At this period, indeed, when beſides the peril which ſeems to threaten from without, every ſpecies of attack is carried on by every artifice of wit, it ſeems little pardonable in thoſe who can examine and inveſtigate, to leave ſo great a matter as the truth of Revelation undecided in their minds: a point on which depends what-

ever they can hope beyond this life, and indeed the whole form and tendency even of their moral conduct in it. For that which it is baſe for him to do, who has another life before him, may be very pardonable in a man who thinks that in this world alone he has a hope of being happy.

To the ſecond claſs, whom we ſuppoſed qualified only to appreciate the talents of others, and take advantage of their reſearches and diſcoveries, we may now ſay, that they ſhould be more than ever careful to what inſtructors they attend. Let them judge, too, ſince they muſt be allowed to judge of perſons and probabilities, how far it is likely that what the wiſeſt and moſt enquiring men of former ages could not diſcover, ſhould now be plain to the moſt ſuperficial pretenders. Of the wiſe men who were the ornaments of ages paſt, they may, at leaſt, judge impartially; while the heroes of the preſent hour are ſet off by a falſe glare of recent reputation, which makes them more regarded than their worth can warrant.—Whence can proceed this blaze of illumination which the pretended Philoſophers of the preſent day enjoy, according to their own account, and laviſhly

diſpenſe?

diſpenſe? Not, undoubtedly, from more profound or more laborious reſearches, than were made by learned men of former times; not from any advantage of ſituation either in time or place; for thoſe who were nearer both to the place and period of the publication of the Goſpel, were ſurely better qualified to ſucceed in ſuch enquiries. Whence then does it proceed?—If we may decide upon it by its fruits, from no good ſource; for it produces, as we ſee, the contempt of all morality, the deſtruction of all relative feelings, not only ſocial, but human; injuſtice and cruelty towards men; inſolence and impiety towards God. It is much more reaſonable to rely on thoſe, who to their wiſdom added the practice of the brighteſt virtues, than on thoſe, the wretchedneſs of whoſe principles is exceeded only by the depravity of their conduct. "By their "fruits ye ſhall know them."

The third claſs of thoſe, who can neither make reſearches for themſelves, nor rightly venture to appreciate the characters and diſcoveries of others, may be warned how they preſume to make a deſperate deciſion in ſuch a point as that of faith: humble and religious within their preſent ſphere of knowledge,

they have little to apprehend even in caſe of error. Whatever be the truth, humility and piety can never be, in any ſyſtem, liable to puniſhment: whereas to relinquiſh this wiſe plan, and adopt an infidelity, of which they neither comprehend the reaſons, nor diſcern the end; and to become all that they now abhor; is to gain at beſt but little eaſe of conſcience whenever the traces of their firſt perſuaſion ſhall return; and the certainty of puniſhment, too well deſerved, from that God, if indeed he be the Lord, whom they, without a reaſonable cauſe, ſhall have thus forſaken.—To have walked in the path in which they were inſtructed, and to have walked in it conſcientiouſly, muſt be to have led a meritorious life; but to follow the faſhion of impiety, and obey thoſe who exhort them to forſake Religion, can only be ſecure upon ſuch ſuppoſitions as a Chriſtian hears with horror, and they who daringly aſſert, can never prove.

In this country we hope (and God grant it may be with reaſon!) that there exiſts a very prevalent ſpirit of attachment to Religion, which will be able ſtrongly to oppoſe the innovations of impiety. Here, if any

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where, will be made, ſhould the occaſion require it, a glorious ſtand in defence of virtue, principle, and true Religion. Attached to ſuch a Faith as has been examined to the utmoſt, proved by every poſſible care, and purified from all corrupt additions, the Believers of this Nation, it is ſtrongly to be confided, will periſh man by man in defence of ſacred Truth, rather than give way to the incurſions of impiety, and renounce what they have learned of the Word of Life, and what they have expected of mercy from the Almighty. To encourage them to this, let them bear in mind, that no recent diſcoveries have been made in favour of infidelity, and that the cry, however loud, which aſcends from a neighbouring ſtate againſt Religion, has no more reaſon in it than the voice of any ſingle individual, who, at the ſuggeſtion of his worſt paſſions, has had the audacity to caſt off his Faith. Bold aſſertions and the voice of multitudes with ſome men ſupply the place of reaſon; but the declaration even of infinite numbers againſt that which is capable of proof, is devoid of all validity: and though in the hour of tumult and of ſtrife the evidences of Religion, cannot, perhaps, be diſtinctly called to mind; yet it may be

remembered at all periods, and in all ſituations, that ſuch evidences do exiſt, as cannot be invalidated by any audacity of denial, but on the ſureſt grounds of reaſon demand our perfect and unalterable Faith. If we think any thing of multitudes, let it be of thoſe who, in early times, when all the proofs of Faith were recent, ſealed their conſtancy with their blood, and periſhed rather than renounce the name of Chriſt.—Theſe alſo were multitudes, and far more worthy of attention than any who, at this late day, may ignorantly clamour againſt Truth.

At this period the prayer of every individual for himſelf ſhould be, that he may be enabled to withſtand all varieties of temptation, and, in every moment and every ſituation, have conſtancy and courage to hold faſt the Faith he has received without wavering:—for his country he ſhould pray, that after many glorious acts by which ſhe has diſtinguiſhed herſelf among the nations, ſhe may ſtill add this praiſe, ſuperior to whatever ſhe has yet atchieved, that in an age of much impiety ſhe was found to be the parent of "a faithful people, zealous of good "works."

Now to God, &c.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIII.

THAT WE CANNOT TRULY LOVE GOD, UNLESS WE FIRST LOVE OUR BRETHREN.

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1 JOHN iv. 20.

If a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God, whom he hath not ſeen?

IT is obſervable, that this great queſtion is put by the Apoſtle with as much ſimplicity as if the anſwer to it depended upon the belief of an axiom, or ſelf-evident propoſition; as if, in ſhort, it were directly contrary to reaſon to aſſert, that a man could love a being of whom he had no direct knowledge, and yet be deficient in affection towards one of whom his knowledge was intimate.

The connection and force of this argument are certainly not ſo clearly perceived by the

mind of every reader as they muſt have been by that of the writer, otherwiſe the paſſage would never have been clouded by miſinterpretation. Of this, however, we may reſt aſſured, that, whether we can trace it or not, the propoſition on which the whole depends is ſomething very ſimple and ſelf-evident; for that alone can juſtify the queſtion of the Apoſtle, "he that loveth not his brother, "whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God, "whom he hath not ſeen?"—No man of common ſenſe, much leſs of ſound and accurate reaſoning powers, would put a queſtion in this form, unleſs it ſeemed to him, that it, in a manner, anſwered itſelf; that is, that the anſwer would be readily conceived by every juſt and rightly tutored underſtanding, and that it would be favourable to the tenor of the preceding aſſertion. If therefore we find any difficulty in tracing this connection, it will not be becauſe the ſubject has any inherent obſcurity, but becauſe we have not perfectly acquired or adopted the principles by which the Apoſtle's mind was then conducted.

For this reaſon it ſeems impoſſible to receive, as entirely ſatisfactory, the illuſtration of this text formerly offered (in this place) by one whoſe

whoſe active mind as often went beyond the truth, by diving too profoundly for it, as thoſe of inferior energy ſtop ſhort of it, by enquiring too ſuperficially*. This celebrated writer imagined he ſaw in this ſhort ſentence of the Apoſtle the ſeeds of all that ſyſtem of morality which had been delivered by a contemporary poet, and was illuſtrated by his own commentaries; namely, the progreſs of the human mind from ſelf-love, gradually refined into private and ſocial affection, extended to general benevolence, and terminating in the contemplation and love of the *Supreme Good*. Without controverting the ſoundneſs of theſe principles, in point of abſtract conſideration, this may undoubtedly be aſſerted, that if St. John had written what could not be comprehended till theſe refinements were diſcovered, nor in any place where they were not introduced and received, he wrote to very little purpoſe. His reaſoning, to be worthy of himſelf and his miniſtry, muſt be ſuch as might have been underſtood at that very time; and ſuch as was, in fact, deducible, by ſome very eaſy proceſs, from his own words. His

* Warburton, Serm. iii. Vol. I. p. 77—83.

intention

intention evidently was to inculcate univerſal charity and good will, in which if he could not ſucceed till he had perſuaded his diſciples that their affections proceeded by that metaphyſical gradation, and that they muſt love in every degree between ſelf and the univerſe before they could love God, his taſk would not only have been difficult, but deſperate. We might, at leaſt, have expected to find ſome of thoſe principles laid down as a groundwork; for which, however, we ſhall look in vain in his epiſtle.

If, inſtead of conſulting our own imaginations, we turn to that part of ſcripture, we ſhall find, much more to our ſatisfaction, and in conformity to our rational expectations, the key to the whole difficulty in the very verſe immediately preceding that of my text.

"We love God," it is there ſaid, "be-
"cauſe he firſt loved us:" that is to ſay, it is the love of God towards mankind, on which alone our proper love for him is founded.—The only obſcurity is, that *us* is there put for men in general, and not referred to each individual: that being once underſtod, the argument follows moſt cloſely thus: conſequently, if we have no general benevolence towards men,

men, whom we know, and among whom we are placed, we can have no real love for Him, of whom we know nothing that can excite ſuch affection, except his general goodneſs towards his creatures; or, in the words of the Apoſtle, "He that loveth not his bro-"ther, whom he hath ſeen, how can he love "God, whom he hath not ſeen?"—The ſame reaſoning is tacitly implied in a former paſſage of the ſame chapter: "Beloved, if "God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love "one another. *No man hath ſeen God at any* "*time.* If we love one another, God dwell-"eth in us, and his love is perfected in "us*."—That is, no man is ſufficiently acquainted with God to feel the affection for him that he deſerves; but if we have a true benevolence towards one another, we cannot fail ſincerely to love God for the infinite love he has exerted towards us all.

I believe this explanation is correct; at leaſt it ſeems to me to accord exactly with the nature of the Apoſtle's argument; and to form that connection between the ſubdiviſions of theſe paſſages which we always expect to find in the compoſitions of a reaſon-

* Ver. 11, 12.

able

able writer. The propoſition itſelf appears to be ſtrictly true, and of very great importance; and conſequently ſuch as well deſerved to be inculcated by a writer divinely inſpired. In theſe two points of view I will now proceed to give it a further examination.

It muſt not, in the firſt place, be imagined that the Apoſtle is here treating of any thing but general benevolence, or, more properly, Chriſtian love and charity: for, though the expreſſion is ſingular, "loveth not *his bro-* "*ther*," it is evident from the whole context, that there is no alluſion made to an accidental failure of affection towards one individual: the whole inſtruction is generally directed; all men are exhorted to love all men, and to this every part of the reaſoning tends: "Beloved," it is ſaid, "let us "love one another: for love is of God *." In ſome paſſages the two modes of expreſſion are ſo united as to exclude all pretence of ambiguity: "Whoſoever doth not righteouſ- "neſs is not of God, *neither he that loveth* "*not his brother:* for this is the meſſage that "ye heard from the beginning, that *we* "*ſhould love one another* †." The intention

* Ver. 7. † Chap. iii. 11.

of

of the writer is therefore, throughout, to enforce this Chriſtian principle, for which purpoſe he could not take a method more direct than that of ſhowing, that it is vain to make pretences to piety, vain and falſe to talk of loving God, if we have not good will towards men, which is ſo truly the root of all real affection to God, that without the one the other cannot be produced.

And here we may be allowed curſorily to obſerve, how much internal evidence of authenticity theſe precepts carry with them. St. John was the evangeliſt who moſt diſtinctly recorded the declarations of our Saviour on this ſubject; and he it is who, in theſe epiſtles, refers more than once to thoſe words, as to the commandment which *they had heard from the beginning*; that is, which he had taught his church, as we muſt ſuppoſe he would, when he firſt began to inſtruct it. In the 13th chapter of his Goſpel he relates that Jeſus ſaid, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye alſo love one another. By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye

" have love one to another *." Well might that diſciple deſerve a peculiar ſhare of the attachment of his bleſſed Maſter, whoſe candid and affectionate mind ſo readily received, and ſo perfectly retained, the moſt benevolent of all his benevolent precepts.

With reſpect to the connection of the Apoſtle's aſſertions in this place, perhaps it may be more perfectly diſplayed by the following mode of conſideration. His words are theſe: " We love him (that is, God), " becauſe he firſt loved us: If a man ſaith, " I love God, and hateth his brother, he is " a liar," and ſo forth; which, according to the doctrine here laid down, may thus be paraphraſed: " We love God, becauſe he " firſt loved us: if a man pretend to love " God, who is not influenced by that prior " conſideration, he ſpeaks falſely; for man, " whom he hath ſeen, he hath many reaſons " to love; but God, whom he hath not ſeen, " he can only love through the medium of " that feeling." If any man can ſuggeſt a mode of connection by which the two aſſertions of the writer can be more cloſely united

* Ver. 34, 35.

than

than they appear in this relation, I give up my interpretation; till then, reaſon, and a reſpect for the reaſoning faculties of the Apoſtle, will compel me to maintain it; unleſs, indeed, it can be proved that the aſſertion is not true, in which caſe there could be no pretence for attributing it to ſuch an author.

That it is conformable to truth, may, I conceive, be proved in the following manner. When we contemplate the idea we are able to form of God, whether it be collected from the ſpeculations of our own reaſon, or drawn from the more perfect ſources of his revealed word, our notions of his nature and attributes, ſublime as we may feel them on many accounts, are ſuch as, in general, muſt excite aſtoniſhment and admiration, rather than affection. Eternity and immenſity are wonderful things, and our minds appear to labour in endeavouring to conceive them; but there is no kind of love attached to theſe high properties. Matter and ſpace have been by ſome imagined to be eternal and immenſe; yet no one ever yet pretended an affection for matter and ſpace. It would indeed be abſurd to affect ſuch feelings, which nature does not authorize.

authorize. Wiſdom and Knowledge, poſſeſſed in infinite perfection, will naturally command our admiration; but our affection tends not of itſelf towards any being, merely becauſe he ſo greatly excels us in thoſe qualities: and Power unlimited is rather an object of terror than of love, till we are aſſured of the benevolent diſpoſition of him in whom it reſides.—The ſame, or much the ſame, may be ſaid of Juſtice, Truth, Purity, Holineſs, and whatever elſe we can conceive or know of God, ſo long as we do not know that it is kindly exerted towards us and our fellow-creatures.—Infinite Benevolence alone is the attribute that endears to us the idea of a God; and even this we cannot feel with proper energy, unleſs we ſee it exerciſed among ourſelves. Benevolence in the abſtract will be very coldly approved, and very languidly admired. But when it is exerted towards thoſe we love, then a real intereſt is excited, which itſelf deſerves the title of affection. Love reſts not upon barren ſpeculations, but tends towards real objects.

Our brother we have ſeen, and Nature prompts us to love him. Our common qualities, our common feelings, our common lot, and

and even our common wants, infirmities, and ſufferings, are all ſo many ties by which we are, or ought to be, moſt tenderly united. Our mutual intercourſe, and habits of aſſociation, further endear us, and the ſervices which are neceſſarily interchanged among us complete the attachment. All this is nature, and ſo truly human nature, that the mutual hatred which jarring paſſions ſometimes occaſion, is commonly and rightly denominated unnatural. But to God we are not thus naturally attracted. He is unlike us; he is in all things infinitely above us; he is ſo far removed from our perceptions, that in this world we cannot ſee, or have any intercourſe with him. How then ſhould we love him? It is altogether a vain pretence, unleſs we acquire our affection for him in the way that the Apoſtle preſcribes.

His benevolence towards each individual might, indeed, afford ſufficient cauſe for ſtrong attachment to God, were it in every inſtance diſtinguiſhed and particular: but the bleſſings we receive from this great Benefactor are, in general, common to all, or to a very conſiderable part of mankind; and it is not by any means natural to us to feel ſtrong gra-

titude for favours that we receive, only in common with thoſe, whom we regard within difference, or perhaps with diſlike.—The light of the ſun, and the freſhneſs of the air, are bleſſings of infinite importance to us; but we feel them not as favours, when we perceive how univerſally they are diſpenſed, until we learn to take an intereſt in the welfare of all thoſe by whom they are enjoyed. Beſides this, a love of God founded on the mere conſideration of ſelf, if it could exiſt, would be a narrow and unworthy paſſion, incapable of ſubſiſting under ſufferings and chaſtiſements: and were it poſſible to ſuppoſe that God was good to one, and not to any other of mankind, it would be little leſs than criminal in that one, to love him for the ſake of himſelf, to the neglect and contempt of all others.

But when, by cultivating the good propenſities of our nature, and correcting ſuch as are evil, we have learned to regard our brethren in this world with ſtrong and brotherly affection; when we have made it a ruling object in our minds to do them good and to promote their happineſs; then do we begin to feel a real intereſt in the general diſpenſations

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of Providence, and to know that we love God becauſe he firſt loved us: and if we are touched with the inferior inſtances of divine benevolence, the creation and preſervation of mankind, and the ordinary ſatisfactions and bleſſings provided for them by our heavenly Father in this world, how muſt we be moved by that ſtupendous inſtance of affection which the Apoſtle had chiefly in his contemplation, the Redemption of man, and the wonderful efforts made to ſecure to him the hopes of everlaſting happineſs! "In this, ſays St. "John, was manifeſted the love of God to-"wards us, becauſe that God ſent his only-"begotten Son into the world, that we "might live through him. Herein is love, "not that we loved God, but that he loved "us, and ſent his Son to be the propitiation "for our ſins. Beloved, if God ſo loved "us, we ought alſo to love one another *."

Here the principle, in a manner, reacts upon us, and, having gained a firm foundation for a real love of God, in the conſideration of his goodneſs towards thoſe whom we are naturally capable of loving, with a ſtrong and lively affection, we find an additional cauſe of love

* Ch. iv. 9, 10, 11.

towards them, in reflecting that they have been thought worthy of ſuch regard by the moſt pure and perfect of Beings.

Another advantage gained by founding our love of God on the love of our fellow-creatures is this, implied alſo in the words of my text, and in the correſponding paſſage, "No "man hath ſeen God at any time;"—the one is a ſpeculative, the other a practical affection. If we could love God in the firſt inſtance, it would be by abſtraction of mind; by conſidering his perfections, and dwelling upon them in contemplation; and, conſequently, our affection could never riſe beyond the meaſure of the imperfect conceptions we are able to form within ourſelves, on this ſtupendous ſubject. But benevolence towards our fellow-creatures is perpetually increaſed by the very exerciſe of it: we love thoſe to whom we do good, even more, in many inſtances, than thoſe from whom we receive it: and, conſequently, if the Apoſtle's reaſoning be juſt, as our benevolence towards man becomes more perfect and more exalted by the habit of exerting it, our love to God will at the ſame time, and by the ſame means, be growing more real and more intenſe.

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The whole chain of our duties is connected by theſe principal ties. If we truly love God, we ſhall readily obey him: this is in nature alſo, and on this principle, taken from the mere knowledge of ourſelves, the Apoſtle John purſues his argument: "this is the "love of God, that we keep his command-"ments, and his commandments (he adds) "are not grievous." v. 3. Certainly not, if love to our fellow-creatures have been previouſly eſtabliſhed within us: for to theſe points they principally tend; to abſtain from injuring one another, and to do whatever good our faculties and circumſtances ſhall place within our power.—The only obſtacle is *the world*; that is, thoſe worldly paſſions, and deſires of preſent gratification, which violently call us back from the conſideration of others, to ourſelves. But, ſays the Apoſtle, "Whatſoever is born of God overcometh "the world; and this is the victory that "overcometh the world, even our faith."—Thus faith enables us to command ourſelves, and benevolence enables us to love and to obey our heavenly Father. The connection of the whole is intimate.

I have endeavoured in this diſcourſe, to give a plain and ſimple account of the reaſoning of the Apoſtle in my text; ſuch as might at any time have been drawn from the examination of the context: and to ſtate ſome of the moſt obvious points in the knowledge of human nature, which he appears, when he wrote, to have had in contemplation: convinced that it was in this way, and not by ſubtilty and refinement, that the Apoſtle endeavoured to inſtruct mankind. The concluſion eſtabliſhed by theſe arguments is clear, and, as it ſeems, undeniable; namely, that when we think of God, we think of a Being of whom our conceptions are ſo very imperfect, that if we pretend to love him with ſuch ardour as we ought, abſtractedly, we deceive ourſelves or others. But that if we exerciſe the benevolent affections which he has implanted in us, towards thoſe objects to which they are naturally directed, we ſhall find a lively and an active love of God ſpringing up ſpontaneouſly, from the ſource of thoſe good feelings.—The experiment is a ſafe, an eaſy one. Let us give it a fair trial, and labour daily to increaſe our love towards our brethren, that we may riſe in time to a ſtrong and

and real love of God, productive of all obedience towards him, and to ourselves, of everlasting blessedness.

Now to God, who has given these hopes to us and all mankind, to God the Father, &c.

DISCOURSE XIV.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD; HOW IT ARISES.— A Sequel to that on 1 John iv. 20.

MATTH. xxii. 37, 38.

Jeſus ſaid unto him, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the firſt and great commandment.

THIS commandment, moſt emphatically delivered to Iſrael by Moſes, in his ſolemn recapitulation of the divine law, is here completely adopted and renewed, by the ſecond, and greater Lawgiver.

Theſe words, as addreſſed to the Iſraelites, undoubtedly were pointed in part againſt idolatry, the prevailing evil of that time, and implied that their religious attachment was not to be divided among various objects of worſhip, but concentred in the Lord alone. As addreſſed

addreſſed to Chriſtians, whoſe danger of apoſtacy was to ariſe not from material but ſpiritual idols, the corrupt affections and paſſions of humanity, they certainly imply that the love of God is to be cheriſhed within us to a degree of fervour and ſtrength, which may render it at all times the governing principle of our minds.

St. Matthew has contented himſelf with giving the ſubſtance and meaning of the precept in Deuteronomy *; expreſſing the ſtrong poſſeſſion which this affection ought to have of our ſpiritual powers. St. Mark, in the parallel paſſage, has cited the exact words of Moſes, and more at length, retaining the ſolemn addreſs to Iſrael which makes the paſſage ſo ſtriking, and that aſſertion of the divine unity, which referred particularly to the circumſtances of that people. The words are theſe: "Hear, O Iſrael—The Lord our "God is one Lord. And thou ſhalt love the "Lord thy God with all thy heart and with "all thy ſoul, (and with all thy mind, *not* "*in Deut.*) and with all thy ſtrength †."— Such was the great commadment to Iſrael, and ſuch is the great commandment ſtill.

* Chap vi. 5. † Mark xii. 29, 30.

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The fundamentals of the Law are not changed, though the particulars have been graciouſly modified, according to the change of circumſtances.

But though this be in truth the firſt commandment, in point of dignity and excellence, we are not to ſuppoſe that it is, or can be, the firſt in the order of our acquirement. We are formed to riſe progreſſively from low to higher things; and as our ideas are all originally derived from our corporeal ſenſes, and the reflex operations of our minds upon the notices thus collected, ſo alſo are our virtues firſt acquired by the exerciſe of their principles upon worldly objects, and afterwards refined by reaſon, to the higher degrees of excellence which they are capable of attaining. We cannot, in any of our energies or habits, begin with that which is beſt; but towards that point muſt make our progreſs by frequent exertion, and gradual improvement.

In my laſt diſcourſe I took occaſion to ſtate this principle, in illuſtration of the important queſtion of the Apoſtle John, "He "that loveth not his Brother whom he hath "ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath "not ſeen?"—In purſuing which enquiry within

within myſelf, I have found remarkably exemplified a circumſtance peculiar to the ſacred writings, and highly illuſtrative of that pure and ſimple truth by which it is occaſioned. It is this: that, though the precepts of Revelation are not ſyſtematically arranged, but either ariſe out of the facts related, or are adapted to the particular wants of the perſons originally addreſſed; and though, from this detached mode of delivery, they appear, ſometimes, on a very ſuperficial view, to be in ſome degree repugnant to each other; yet any one of them, fairly traced to its fundamental principle, will be found not only altogether conſiſtent with the reſt, but explanatory even of thoſe to which it ſeemed at firſt to ſtand in oppoſition; and further, fruitful in explanations of ſeveral paſſages not apparently connected with it. Such is the intimate connection of truth with itſelf, and ſo thoroughly calculated are the precepts of divine wiſdom to coaleſce into a conſiſtent ſyſtem, though the taſk of reducing them to that form has not been performed for us; being wiſely left as a moſt uſeful exerciſe for the diligence and piety of men. In the preſent inſtance, the object was to underſtand

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the queſtion of the Apoſtle, and to diſcern its connection with the context of his Epiſtle. To this end it appeared indiſpenſably neceſſary to allow, that the *love of God* within our minds is ſo far derived from the love of man, and founded on it, that where the one feeling is wanting the other cannot poſſibly exiſt. On examining this ſubject, arguments of ſome weight ſpontaneouſly offered themſelves in confirmation of the above aſſertion; but how was it to be reconciled to the well known declaration of our Saviour, repeated in my preſent text, that the love of God is our *firſt* Duty? This we are apt too haſtily to underſtand, as if it were not only the moſt excellent, but alſo the *firſt* in order of time, and the foundation on which the other ſhould be raiſed.—You have perceived already, how eaſily this difficulty is removed, and how conſonant it is to our moſt correct ideas of our own ſtate, that we ſhould in all things proceed from imperfect to more excellent. The commandment, therefore, which is in excellence the firſt, muſt be, of natural neceſſity, in the courſe of our acquirement, laſt; and conſequently, if we ſo underſtand our Saviour's words as reaſon and ſound criticiſm require, inſtead

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of diſagreement and oppoſition, there will appear a perfect coincidence and mutual accord between the two aſſertions, of the all-wiſe Teacher, and his inſpired Apoſtle.

At the ſame time, by means of the fecundity of Truth before remarked, we obtain an illuſtration of certain ſubſequent expreſſions of our bleſſed Saviour, which, except in this mode of conſideration, it is not ſo eaſy to underſtand. Proceeding to deliver the ſecond great and fundamental commandment, Chriſt ſays, "And the ſecond *is like unto it*, Thou "ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf."—It does not, I believe, ſuggeſt itſelf to any reader, on the firſt view of that paſſage, wherein conſiſts the ſimilarity alledged.—In the dignity and importance of the precept, ſay the interpreters: a ſolution which undoubtedly is right in part, but leaves untouched the moſt material circumſtance of their reſemblance. That they were in thoſe qualities nearly alike, might have been gathered ſufficiently from the manner in which they were there united, and from the ſubſequent declaration that "on "theſe two (jointly) hang all the Law and the "Prophets." But if, as we perceive by the light received from St. John, the love of our neighbour

neighbour and of God are ſo exactly the ſame in principle, that the one is only an improvement and refinement of the other, it may well be ſaid that the commandments which enjoin the two are very ſtrongly ſimilar: and it is further obvious, that this coincidence cannot fully be underſtood by any who have not duly weighed and comprehended the doctrine of the Apoſtle. Thus is wiſdom juſtified by her children.

Having thus far purſued the truth, it cannot fail to be of great importance more fully to develope the nature of that love of God which it is our higheſt duty to cultivate within us: that we may know in what manner we may beſt acquire it ourſelves, and aſſiſt, when opportunities ariſe, the growth of it in others.

The firſt affection that diſcovers itſelf within us, after our birth, is an attachment purely animal, and inſtinctive, to thoſe with whom we have an immediate intercourſe. I call it purely animal, becauſe it does not appear to proceed from reflection, or any combination of diſtinct ideas, nor to be in any way diſtinguiſhable from that which brutes alſo very ſtrongly diſplay, towards thoſe to whoſe appearance,

pearance, voice, and manner they are moſt accuſtomed. It ſeems that in every animal the firſt ſenſation is fear, which, being gradually removed by habitude, is ſucceeded as naturally by love. Children, under the influence of this feeling, acquire a natural and ſtrong attachment to their nurſes, attendants, and neareſt relatives, in whoſe ſociety they live, giving invariably the preference to thoſe with whom they paſs the largeſt proportion of their time.

As ſoon as Reaſon dawns at all, this firſt indiſcriminate affection, derived from habitude alone, is corrected by information: their parents are pointed out as the proper objects of their primary regard, and, by wiſhing to give them the preference, they very quickly learn to love them beſt. This is what we call natural affection, and natural it certainly is, ſince it will ariſe in this manner invariably, unleſs prevented by improper conduct; and will continue to maintain its vigour, and to augment it, unleſs bad paſſions be ſuffered to gain ſufficient ſtrength to produce a contrary effect. At this early period it is evident there can be no love of God, ſince there is no diſcernment of him; nor is

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it poſſible that a creature which has hardly learned to diſtinguiſh the parents that it ſees, ſhould have elevated its thoughts to him that is inviſible in heaven. Yet even now may the ſeeds be ſown, which ſubſequent attention muſt make fruitful. The knowledge of God may be inſtilled. It ought to be imparted, and it will, by all who are not weak enough to leave the moſt important of all ideas to caſual inſtruction; or to the exertions of a reaſon which, perhaps, may never be ſtrong, and muſt for a very long time continue inexperienced. It is not pretended that children can be taught to have correct or refined notions on this exalted ſubject; but thus much they may learn, that there is a Being, whom we worſhip by the name of God, beyond all compariſon wiſer and better than their parents; to whom their parents and themſelves are indebted even for their lives, and for every bleſſing they enjoy; whom, therefore, it is their duty to love, for every reaſon which makes them love their relations, and for the ſake of thoſe relations themſelves, to whom he is ſo good.

Even in this firſt ſtep towards pious affection, appears the truth of the Apoſtle's im-

plied aſſertion, that we cannot love God whom we have not ſeen, if we love not thoſe whom we have ſeen; ſince it would be impoſſible to teach children the very rudiments of the love of God, if they had not natural affection for their inmates here.

As life proceeds, two other principles diſcloſe themſelves, the origin of which it is unneceſſary to enquire. Their exiſtence is undeniable. Theſe are the love of preſent, perſonal gratification, and the love of rectitude: the ſources of evil and of good within us. Both theſe principles are ſtrong, but particularly that which leads to evil; a circumſtance which ſtrongly marks and aſcertains the depraved condition of our nature. Nevertheleſs, the love of rectitude is alſo ſtrong, as is proved by the earneſt zeal for juſtice, diſplayed always among the earlieſt efforts of reaſon; and by the natural deſire of commendation. If the love of perſonal gratification be ſuffered to increaſe, as luxuriantly as naturally it will, without ſtrong oppoſition, there cannot be a hope that the love, either of mankind or of God, will ever grow up in ſuch a mind: a mean unſocial ſelfiſhneſs will ſoon be found to predominate, excluding every

kind of benevolent affection, and eradicating very ſpeedily even thoſe ſhoots of natural attachment, which the firſt propenſities of nature had occaſioned.

To produce the contrary effect, the good principle muſt be cultivated with care, and ſtrengthened by conſtant exerciſe.—With reſpect to the knowledge of God, it will be long before a young perſon can be taught it much more perfectly than in the manner already ſuggeſted; but the love of him having been at firſt excited, by means of the natural love of friends, will increaſe of courſe as that increaſes: the original connection of ideas will be preſerved, and God will always be ſeen as the unknown, but excellent, benefactor of thoſe who are well known and well beloved. The practice of the ſocial virtues will lead inſenſibly to the practice of piety, and the habits formed for the one purpoſe, will be alike favourable to the other. In learning cheerfully and willingly, for affection's ſake, to obey thoſe whoſe right to govern us here is undoubted, we learn to yield the ſame obedience to him, whoſe right is ſimilar in kind, though infinitely ſtronger. In learning to conquer our deſires, for the ſake of pleaſing

them, we obtain the power of making the like efforts in ſerving him. As ſocial affection expands, and is extended to a greater number of objects, the heart is conſtantly meliorated, and the love of goodneſs rendered more intenſe and active. Ere long it will become capable of that beſt exertion of benevolence, the voluntary ſacrifice of ſelf-gratification, for the advantage of others, to whom we are held by no tie but that of good will, or tender regard.

On the whole, the mind firſt exerciſed in goodneſs within its natural ſphere of action, will be fully prepared to elevate itſelf, in due time, to the contemplation and to the love of him, in whom all-perfect goodneſs reſides; but he who has not goodneſs in himſelf, never can be taught to eſteem it rightly in another. How can he love God for his benevolence, who neither feels nor knows benevolence? How can he appreciate, or even believe, the ſacrifice of Chriſt, who thinks it folly to give up his own moſt trifling gratification, for the ſake of ſerving others?

But, through the regular and natural gradations of human improvement, the point to which we tend, as the utmoſt deſirable

perfection,

perfection, is that of loving God "with "all our heart, with all our ſoul, and with "all our ſtrength." This we then only can be ſaid to have attained, when having, by the practice of all goodneſs in our power, acquired a juſt eſtimation and ardent affection for it, we are able to contemplate God as the perfect ſource and treaſure of all that we conſider as moſt truly amiable. A few propoſitions may be thus connected, ſo as to convey at once a diſtinct view of the whole ſubject. He who loves not goodneſs cannot love God: but it is impoſſible to love goodneſs without having practiſed it; nor can it, in moſt caſes, be practiſed by man, except within the natural ſphere of human action, that is towards man.

Here then is a new teſt, but one moſt truly Chriſtian, of our love towards God; to examine whether we are ready, on all occaſions, to do good to our brethren. We have fully ſeen, in the courſe of our preſent reaſonings, that the one feeling can only be acquired by means of the other; and therefore cannot doubt that where the primary habit is defective, the ultimate accompliſhment muſt be ſtill more imperfect. Hence alſo we are enabled to account for that gracious ſubſti-

tution which our Saviour announced in one of his parables; wherein he repreſents the good at the laſt day, as aſtoniſhed to find themſelves commended for acts of mercy and kindneſs towards their Lord, which they were wholly unconſcious of having performed. "Lord, when ſaw we thee an hun-"gered, and fed thee? or thirſty, and gave "thee drink? when ſaw we thee a ſtranger, "and took thee in? or naked, and clothed "thee? or when ſaw we thee ſick, or in "priſon, and came unto thee?"—To which our Lord replies, by ſhowing the utmoſt intimacy of connection between their love of their brethren, and their love of him,—"Verily "I ſay unto you, inaſmuch as ye have "done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my "brethren, ye have done it unto me *." To the wicked the contrary declaration is made, on the very ſame principles: a leſſon moſt cloſely connected with the ſpeculations we have been now purſuing, and by them ſtrongly illuſtrated.

It is, by every poſſible evidence, moſt manifeſtly the intention of God, that men ſhould be the miniſters of good to one another.

* Matt. xxv. 37, &c.

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What then can we think of that depravity, which makes them mutually the miniſters of ſo abundant evil?—and what particularly of that falſe zeal for God, which has ſo often been deſtructive of benevolence, charity, and peace? By what we have now argued, we may be fully aſſured that theſe effects are perfectly contradictory to the genuine love of God. Nor ſhall we in future expect that any man can love the Lord with all his heart, and all his ſoul, and all his mind, and all his ſtrength, till he ſhall have firſt learned to love his neighbour as himſelf.

Now to God, &c.

What then can we think of that depravity, which makes them mortally the ministers of so abundant evil? And what particularly of that fatal zeal for God, which has so often been destructive of benevolence, charity, and peace? By what we have now argued, we may be fully assured that their efforts are perfectly contradictory to the genuine love of God. Nor shall we in future expect that any man can love the Lord with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind, and all his strength, till he shall have first learned to love his neighbour as himself.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XV.

ON THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

MATT. xxii. part of ver. 39.

Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.

THIS being the foundation of the whole moral law, according to the doctrine of him to whom all hearts are open, may be expected to afford abundant matter of inſtruction to thoſe who will reflect upon it carefully. Of its obligation upon us as a precept ſo delivered, and enforced by ſimilar injunctions, from every evangelical authority, it is not my preſent purpoſe to diſcourſe: I ſhall conſider this, ſo often explained by Chriſtian teachers, ſo obvious in itſelf to all who look into the Word of Life, as known ſufficiently to all. Nor ſhall I make it my object to diſplay its practical utility; nor to ſhow, what often has been ſhown, how all the duties and forbearances of ſocial life ſpring naturally from this root,

root, ſince he who truly loves his neighbour as himſelf, will, of courſe, forbear to do him injury, and joyfully embrace all opportunities of doing him good. Theſe parts of the ſubject, not as unimportant, but as in this place perhaps unneceſſary, I may be allowed to wave, and confine myſelf to the leſs obvious, but, to ſome minds, not leſs uſeful conſideration, how deep an inſight into the whole nature of man is diſcoverable in this injunction!

That ſuch a knowledge of human nature is here implied, will be moſt fully illuſtrated, if it can be ſhown, that the precept, which is thus delivered as the whole foundation of the moral law, conducts us directly to diſcover the grand ſource of moral feeling in our hearts.

The moſt enlightened of the ancient philoſophers talked much of living according to nature, as a general rule of moral virtue. Modern enquirers have ſuppoſed a moral ſenſe, by which we are enabled inſtinctively to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong; and at the ſame time are inclined to approve the one, and to abhor the other. The truth is, I believe, that both theſe ſyſtems are contained within

within the more comprehenſive view of our divine Inſtructor. I am perſuaded that to live according to nature, is to be guided by that natural affection for our ſpecies, which is undoubtedly inſtinctive in us; and that the moral ſenſe itſelf is derived from, and totally dependent on, theſe natural feelings.

Man is a ſocial animal, not by his own choice, nor by accident, but by the neceſſity of his nature. Solitude is in itſelf painful to him; he cannot live in total ſeparation from his fellow-creatures, or at leaſt he cannot live happily; not only becauſe he is in want of their aſſiſtance, but alſo becauſe he has a natural want of their affection, and feels an urgent neceſſity to interchange his own with them. Paradiſe itſelf could not be a place of bliſs for him, without a partner in it; and had he continued in it, the further increaſe of numbers, in a ſtate of innocence, would conſtantly have augmented his felicity.

We may divide our natural affections into two great branches; love for ourſelves, and love for our ſpecies. The former, natural, as we cannot but ſuppoſe, to all living creatures; the latter, certainly natural to us as human creatures: both, in us, equally original,

equally

equally implanted by the hand of the Creator. They ought alſo, as my text declares, to be maintained equal in degree; "Thou ſhalt "love thy neighbour *as thyſelf*."—Nor is it, undoubtedly, contrary to nature that theſe affections ſhould be thus equally divided. A powerful inſtinct leads us to aſſociate with our fellow-creatures; the habit of living in ſtrict union conſtantly increaſes the inſtinctive affection, till we become neceſſary to each other. By ſuch progreſſion we not only arrive at the point of loving others as ourſelves, but we even go beyond it; and the enthuſiaſm of regard which makes us more anxious for thoſe others than even for ourſelves, more provident of their good and more apprehenſive of their ſuffering than of our own, is among the moſt natural movements of the uncorrupted heart. It is by depravity of heart only that we learn to love ourſelves too much, and others too little; and hence ariſes the neceſſity of the precept.

The great increaſe of attachment above ſtated, though not to be expected in every caſe, is at leaſt a proof what nature will admit. In a more general way, a certain interchange of feelings, called Sympathy, is

natural

natural to us. We participate in the joys and ſufferings of others, even involuntarily, and we expect the ſame return of ſympathy from them. Our joy is not perfect joy, unleſs there be ſome one to partake it, and our ſorrow almoſt ceaſes to be ſorrow when others manifeſt a lively intereſt in it. Theſe natural ſympathies are the general bond of affection among human creatures; we love thoſe who feel them ſtrongly, we diſapprove and diſlike thoſe in whom we find them leſs or more deficient. But they are found almoſt in all, becauſe they are an original part of our nature, and conſequently our affection is naturally united to all, by this common bond of intereſt.

Here then, methinks, we find our *moral ſenſe*, or natural love of virtue and abhorrence of vice. Our feelings concerning them are not general at firſt; we learn to love and hate them from ſpecific inſtances: we ſee or feel them in their conſequences upon ourſelves and others; and they raiſe in us affection or abhorrence, as proofs of the perfection or the deficience of the ſocial ſympathy. If another do evil to us, we conſider it as a demonſtration that he wants that kind feeling towards

us, which nature teaches us to expect from all. The general bond of ſympathy appears to be broken between us; we are diſunited; but the ſeparation is unnatural, and it is painful. Dwelling with abhorrence upon what we feel to be an offence againſt nature, we applaud our own hearts for having expected different treatment, and exclaim, though with bitterneſs, yet with internal exultation, "I "could not have dealt ſo by him!" Thus it is true that we abhor the evil, but the reaſon is alſo evident. We abhor it as a proof that Social Sympathy and the natural affections of humanity have been contemned and violated. Thus alſo if we hear of evil done to another, our feelings are of the ſame kind. It is Sympathy that ſpeaks. We put ourſelves in the place of the injured perſon, we feel for him, we repreſent to our imaginations his diſtreſs and ſufferings, and exclaim, "How "cruel! how unnatural!" and we conſider both the fact and the perpetrator of it as odious, on account of this notorious diſregard of natural feelings. In the ſame manner are we affected concerning good. Inſtances of it exhibited towards ourſelves produce regard directly: they act in the ſame tendency with nature,

nature, and rapidly aſſiſt the original diſpoſition towards affection. Inſtances of good conferred on others intereſt us by Sympathy. In good done to others we rejoice as naturally, as in good done to ourſelves; and our approbation of it originates in the inſtinctive benevolence of our nature. When we have ourſelves done good or evil to others, and reflect upon it, conſcience informs us, that, by thoſe actions, we have deſerved the love or hatred of thoſe perſons, and we feel ſatisfaction or uneaſineſs accordingly. All moral conſiderations recal us to our natural union with our fellow-creatures; nor could we, as it ſeems, be otherwiſe than indifferent to whatever by any means promoted their happineſs, or occaſioned their miſery, were it poſſible that we ſhould totally diveſt ourſelves of all affection for them, of all ſympathy in their feelings, of all deſire for their regard, or good opinion*. From all which it appears to be extremely evident that the chief, if not the only ſource of moral feelings, or that which has been called the *moral ſenſe*, is the natural attachment of human beings to each other: that principle of ſocial union, which

* This ſubject, which is here but briefly touched, might eaſily be expanded into a complete moral ſyſtem.

is

is gratified and delighted naturally with all that tends to general good, hurt and wounded by every thing that tends to general evil. And thus alſo it appears that *living according to nature*, ſo far as morality is concerned in it, is living according to the impulſes of natural and ſocial feelings.

We ſeem then to have proved the point from which we firſt ſet out, that in delivering the precept in my text, of loving our neighbours as ourſelves, our Saviour gave us a complete key not only to the practice, but alſo to the very ſource of all morality, and has therein evinced his perfect knowledge of our nature. Certain it is, that when we loſe the natural benevolence of human creatures, we almoſt loſe our right to bear the name. When ſelfiſhneſs, or the violence of any uncorrected paſſion urges us to a diſregard of every evil we may bring on others, and deſtroys the ſympathy that ſhould excite the conſcience to regret and to redreſs them, we become unfit for the ſociety of men; and againſt this depravity, manifeſted by overt acts of violence, the laws of every country are directed. Nothing good is to be expected from him on whom the diſtreſſes of his fellow-creatures, and, above all, thoſe immediately occaſioned by himſelf, have

have no effect, and in whoſe ſight even their lives are of no value; and ſuch corrupted beings periſh unregretted by the ſeverity of public juſtice. Such are the extreme caſes; but the ſame principle extends, in due proportions, to all inferior violations of morality, and the precept of our Saviour, "Thou ſhalt "love thy neighbour as thyſelf," ſtands as the general antagoniſt to every ſocial offence.

Its influence extends even further: for, if we recollect our former reaſonings on theſe topics, we ſhall confeſs, that even our obedience to the firſt and great commandment in point of dignity, that of "love to God," is itſelf alſo derivable, according to the progreſs of nature, from the ſame ſource. In riſing to the perfection of obedience, we firſt learn to fulfil the lower precept, then the higher; we riſe from leſs to greater, nor can we poſſibly proceed by any other manner of progreſſion; whence it is that St. John, divinely enlightened concerning the nature of our hearts, has told us expreſsly, that the man who pretends to love God, not having a natural affection towards mankind, is not to be believed; he cannot have attained the higher ſtep, but by paſſing through the lower. "If," ſays the Apoſtle,

"a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his "brother, he is a liar;" and he immediately aſſigns the reaſon; "for he that loveth not "his brother, whom he hath ſeen, how can "he love God, whom he hath not ſeen *?" You will recollect, from the explanation I have already given of that text †, that the courſe of nature is this:—We ſee our brethren here on earth, and we are led inſtinctively to love them, long before we can acquire any knowledge or diſtinct apprehenſion that there is a God. When we learn any thing of God, we contemplate him as the common Father of all thoſe we love, as the Almighty Benefactor and Preſerver of us and them: and we begin to love him for his goodneſs to us all. To love him for his ſingle goodneſs towards ourſelves is not enough. We are in general too ſenſible of our own diſadvantages, and too thoughtleſs of our bleſſings, to feel, on that account, the love and gratitude we ought. If our affection to God attain any ſufficient energy, it muſt be cauſed by more extenſive views of his benevolence, and a more general intereſt in its wonderful effects. If we have not benevolence in ourſelves, how can we be

* 1 John iv. 20. † See Diſcourſe XIII. on that text.

ſenſible

ſenſible of its excellence in him? Beſides, we have innumerable reaſons to attach us to our fellow-creatures, with whom we live in conſtant intercourſe: if we reſiſt all theſe, as well as the ſtrong impulſe of nature which directs us to that union of affection with them, it is not to be expected that the ſingle motive of gratitude, which alone, in ſuch a caſe, could lead us to God, and of which the more immediate calls muſt have been diſregarded, ſhould teach us how to love an unſeen Being.

Thus does our Saviour's command of loving one another, moſt fully open to us the origin of our whole duty: and, as I have noticed before, it is obſervable that when he delivers the two precepts, of loving God and our neighbour, he plainly intimates that their natural connection is very cloſe. "Thou "ſhalt love the Lord thy God—this is the "firſt and great commandment; and the ſe-"cond is *like* unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy "neighbour." They are like, becauſe both are founded on the principle of love; and the power of paying due obedience to them both originates from one common cauſe, the benevolent feelings of our nature. Thus can we perfectly underſtand why, in other parts of

the Goſpel, the law of general affection is made the fundamental and diſtinctive doctrine of our Saviour's revelation. He himſelf ſo points it out: "By this ſhall all men know "that ye are my diſciples, if ye have love "one to another*:" and his Apoſtles extol it as the fulfilling of the whole law, and as the law of higheſt dignity, *the royal law*. Thus St. Paul ſays, "For all the law is "fulfilled in one word, even in this; *Thou "ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*†:" and St. James, "If ye fulfil *the royal law*, accord-"ing to the ſcripture, *Thou ſhalt love thy "neighbour as thyſelf*, ye do well‡." Hence alſo we may clearly perceive why they who caſt off all feeling for their fellow-creatures, caſt off alſo all reverence and regard towards God. The great ſource of duty is then corrupted in them, and all that flows from it is poiſoned; or rather the ſource is totally dried up, and no good works of any kind can be produced.

For this reaſon, that is, becauſe the affections are ſo intimately concerned in the due regulation of our lives, *the heart*, the ſuppoſed

* John xiii. 5. † Gal. v. 13, 14. ‡ James ii. 8.

ſeat

ſeat of affection, is uniformly conſidered in ſcripture as the well-ſpring of all duty. It is not to the reaſon or to the mind that our well or ill-doing is referred, but to the *heart*, to the natural feeling or diſpoſition, either purified or corrupted. To do good from the cold conviction of reaſon, or a certain abſtracted perſuaſion of general fitneſs and propriety, is ſcarcely to perform it at all: it muſt be done with feeling, and *from the heart*, before it can be amiable in the ſight of God or man, before it can do honour to humanity. A good Chriſtian, therefore, is not a tame, ſpeculative well-doer, but a lively and active being, thrilling with affectionate diſpoſitions; living, as it were, an expanded life, by ſharing in the intereſts of innumerable perſons: loving his fellow-creatures, not nominally, or lukewarmly, but as himſelf; loving God, not with a dull metaphyſical eſteem, but *with the heart*; with a heart overflowing with gratitude for countleſs inſtances of goodneſs; in a word, with all his heart, with all his ſoul, and all his ſtrength.

Having thus illuſtrated what was at firſt propoſed, that the precept of our Saviour in the text conducts us directly to the whole

ſource of moral feeling in our hearts; and having ſhown even more than that, namely, that it leads us alſo to the ſource of religious duty; there is one remark of another kind, which I cannot repreſs my inclination to ſuggeſt, as it ſeems to ariſe immediately out of this general view of things.

It has appeared, from a careful examination, that the trueſt knowledge of human nature is conveyed to us, by this fundamental precept of the Goſpel, on which I have diſcourſed; that, by purſuing the light it gives, we gain an inſight into ourſelves, which no other inſtructions can beſtow. Let us then aſk ourſelves, what rank of wiſdom and ability among men it is, that can diſcloſe a perfect moral ſyſtem. From the firſt dawnings of human knowledge to the preſent day the ableſt men have been employed upon this ſubject, and every ſyſtem they have offered has appeared, in ſome degree, deficient. Many of them have indeed contradicted each other, and conſequently have left no probability of truth to more than one out of their number: and if this evangelical ſyſtem, which we are now conſidering, be, in fact, the right, all the reſt muſt be imperfect, or erroneous. On

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the one ſide, then, will ſtand all the learning and abilities of the world, and they, in error; on the other ſide, the Goſpel, and that, perfect. If the latter, as we conceive, proceeded from God, this is eaſily accounted for; the work of men is incomplete, the work of God is ſuch as we expect from him. But what ſay the adverſaries of our faith?—that the Goſpel is altogether a human work, the work of impoſture. Admit this, and we have a very different ſtatement of things, and one entirely unaccountable. On the one ſide ſtands the wiſdom of the whole world; on the other, Matthew, Mark, and their aſſociates; a few obſcure and low-bred men of Judea; who yet perform what all the wiſdom of mankind had failed to do. It would be a matter of ſome ſurpriſe if four or five men from the ordinary and labouring claſſes of life, in the moſt enlightened country, could be found capable of comprehending the ſpeculative ſyſtems of morality contrived by others: but to invent, to lay the whole foundation for themſelves; to afford an exerciſe for the moſt ſagacious men for ever, to trace out and to diſcover the full extent of their vaſt wiſdom;—what is this? it is ſurely ſomething preternatural.

May we not, without exaggeration, ſay, that it is full as miraculous as any thing attributed to any perſon in the hiſtory they have left. To ſpeak the tongues of all nations, without having learnt them, is not more wonderful than to ſpeak the language of wiſdom, the moſt difficult of all languages, without preparatory inſtruction.

We have therefore gained by our enquiry, not only what we ſought directly, an illuſtration of our Saviour's doctrine, but incidentally, a ſtrong argument in confirmation of our faith: let us take advantage of both; and, cultivating that Chriſtian benevolence which we have perceived to be the common ſource of every human excellence, let us hold faſt, without wavering, that profeſſion, which alone can give us ſuch divine inſtructions; which alone is truly worthy of God, and ſuperior to all contrivance of mankind.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XVI.

WHY IT WAS NECESSARY FOR CHRIST TO SUFFER.

For GOOD-FRIDAY.

LUKE xxiv. 25, 26.

Then he ſaid unto them, O fools, and ſlow of heart to believe all that the prophets have ſpoken! ought not Chriſt to have ſuffered theſe things, and to enter into his glory?

IT can proceed, ſurely, from no very good propenſity, when, in a ſubject replete with high inſtruction, men will be attentive only to difficulties. That the humiliation and ſufferings of a divine perſonage ſhould have been neceſſary to repair the lapſe of fallen man, and renew his title to ſalvation, is a matter which, though we have abundant reaſon to believe, we are deſtitute of principles

ciples to explain. The cauſe of that neceſſity, whatever it may be, muſt have been originally interwoven with the general plan of Providential Government: and as a primary and indiſpenſable part of that plan, may poſſibly lie open only to the knowledge of that Eternal Wiſdom by which the whole deſign was formed.

Here then that man takes his ſtand, who, for any ſecret cauſe whatever, is unwilling to admit the truth of Revelation. Show him how it can, in any caſe, be neceſſary for the eternal Son of God to ſuffer; ſhow him how the ſalvation of mankind can be an object of importance ſufficient to demand that ſuffering; and ſhow him, laſtly, how that ſuffering operates, and why no other cauſe could operate to the production of the deſired effect; explain to him theſe things, or he will not be perſuaded to believe. He is here, indeed, in his ſtrong hold: and if he obſtinately maintain his reſolution of not believing, 'till theſe points ſhall have been fully cleared, we muſt deſpair of effecting his converſion. For theſe are juſt the points we neither know, nor *yet* pretend to know, *nor* have a hope of finding out.—For they are not

not revealed.—We may ſometimes indulge conjectures, but then we know them for conjectures only, and advance them with humility and doubt. It does not, indeed, ſeem neceſſary that to any created being whatever, God ſhould have diſcloſed the reaſon of thoſe diſpenſations in which he hath purpoſely made it requiſite for himſelf to interfere. Creatures more wiſe, and conſequently leſs arrogant, than man, will behold, in the mere appointment of God, a ſufficient evidence of wiſdom: will feel that he who is the fountain of intelligence, may have counſels that his creatures cannot reach; and, thankful for the knowledge that he does impart, will adore in ſilence where he ſpreads the veil of myſtery.

There is not the ſmalleſt reaſon to ſuppoſe, that this unfolding of what may be called the *primary principles* of Redemption, formed any part of the divine diſcourſe recorded in my text. The rebuke of our bleſſed Saviour to his diſciples, was not occaſioned by their defect in metaphyſical knowledge concerning the nature of *ſin, puniſhment, and redemption*, nor were his inſtructions calculated to remove a deficiency of that nature. He rebuked

buked them for not making application of the Scriptures, which they knew, to thoſe events towards which they were ſo evidently pointed; and at which, for want of that illuſtration, they were, at the time of his reproof, ſo unreaſonably aſtoniſhed: and he expounded to them, not the reaſon by which his heavenly Father was induced to appoint theſe wonderful events, but the ſimple and more uſeful fact, that he had certainly appointed them; and that this appointment was fully evidenced throughout the ancient books of Scripture. "Beginning at Moſes and all the "Prophets, he expounded unto them, in all "the Scriptures, the things concerning him-"ſelf *." "Ought not Chriſt, ſaid he, to "have ſuffered all theſe things, and to enter "into his glory?—That is, "Is it not ma-"nifeſt from the Prophets, that the Chriſt, "whenever he ſhould appear, was appointed "to ſuffer theſe things, and that unleſs he "had ſo ſuffered, there would have been no "prophetic evidences of his miſſion?"

Thoſe who are deſirous of religious inſtruction, will naturally feel inclined to regret the loſs of this divine diſcourſe: a ſermon on

* Ver. 27.

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the prophecies by our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, would, we may imagine, have prevented all diſputes on that part of the ſubject. As it is not preſerved by any of the Evangeliſts we muſt content ourſelves with the ſatisfaction that the ſubſtance of it at leaſt remains in the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament; in ſearching which with diligence for the materials of which it muſt have been compoſed, we may conclude that we ſhall beſt obey the will, and fulfil the deſign, of Providence.

Diſmiſſing then from our minds, with the humility of reaſonable creatures, informed of the real extent of their own faculties, all that in this important ſubject is above the reach of our underſtandings; let us confine ourſelves ſtrictly to the purſuit of ſuch knowledge concerning it, as either Revelation has imparted, or the proper exerciſe of reaſon can ſupply.

I.—In the firſt place, to take up the ſubject where the divine inſtructor of the diſciples took it, this is undeniably plain, that whatever neceſſity there might or might not have been originally, for the ſufferings of Chriſt on earth, ſince the delivery of the prophecies they had become altogether neceſſary.

ceſſary. Either the word of prophecy muſt have failed, and ſuffered direct contradiction from the event, or the Redeemer of mankind muſt have appeared, as he actually did, "de-"ſpiſed and rejected, a man of ſorrows and "acquainted with grief *." "A man op-"preſſed and afflicted, yet opening not his "mouth in complaint, but as a ſheep before "her ſhearers is dumb †," ſo ſilent and ſo patient; it was neceſſary that he ſhould be "cut off from the land of the living, and "ſtricken for the tranſgreſſion of the people;" "betrayed by one whom he had admitted to "his preſence as a friend;" "ſold for thirty "pieces of ſilver;" accuſed by ſuborned witneſſes; contumelioufly uſed and ſpit upon; ſcourged, ſtripped, and ignominiouſly deſtroyed. Unleſs theſe circumſtances, and many more minute particulars, had taken place concerning him, it would have been impoſſible to defend Iſaiah, and the other prophets, from the charge of ignorant impoſture, or the whole body of the Jewiſh Scriptures from confutation, and its attendant contempt. Could a perſon in whom theſe prefixed marks were not found have been

* Iſai. liii. 3. † Ib. 8.

proved

proved to be the Meſſiah, he could not have confirmed the law and the prophets, he muſt have contradicted and annulled them. This then was the ſpecies of neceſſity explained by our Saviour, after his reſurrection, to the diſciples: the neceſſity of preſerving the ſeveral parts of Revelation conſiſtent with each other, and of fulfilling all that the inſpired teachers under the law had declared to be ordained by heaven.

II. To the ſtrong, and apparently inſurmountable objection ariſing from the diſcordance of the two Revelations, would have been added, had the Redeemer undergone no ſufferings, a very increaſed difficulty in eſtabliſhing the proof of his miſſion. For though, on the firſt haſty view of ſuch a ſubject, we are inclined to expect from divine interference that it ſhould remove all obſtacles; and from a teacher commiſſioned by heaven we look that he ſhould bear down all reſiſtance, and baffle every attack; yet, if we conſider the matter more attentively, we ſhall perceive that the arguments ariſing from Chriſt's ſufferings have infinitely greater ſtrength than any that could have been deduced from the moſt unbounded courſe of proſperity. To

convert mankind to a new faith by the miniſtry of a poor, deſpiſed, and perſecuted mortal, is a work which more demands the aid of divine co-operation, than either to perſuade them by popular and unreſiſted eloquence, or to ſubdue them by the force of armies: nay ſtronger even, except to the actual ſpectators of the fact, than to remove the greateſt obſtacles by the viſible exertion of preternatural power.—Mahomet, conſcious that he was unable to ſatisfy any ſuch expectations, pretended to no power of working miracles. The only preternatural efforts to which he attempted to appeal for teſtimony of his miſſion, were the wiſdom of the Koran, and the ſucceſſes of his arms. The former argument appears to have prevailed only becauſe addreſſed to thoſe who were altogether inadequate judges of its validity: and the latter is completely refuted by the equal or ſuperior conqueſts of other men, who pretended to no better reſources than were ſupplied by their own active genius and high courage: ſo weak is neceſſarily the argument from ſucceſsful conqueſt. The progreſs of Moſes was in every ſtep miraculous; and conſonant, in great meaſure, to the common

mon notions of the nature of ſuch a miſſion. He divided the ſea, brought water from the ſolid rock, and at his prayer gained daily bread from heaven: in a word, in all things he evinced himſelf the ſervant of God endued with heavenly power. But it was plainly perceived by Providence that the evidence of theſe miracles, when left to tradition or hiſtory, would grow too weak to ſuſtain the fabric of ſteady faith, and it was kept in force, therefore, by the eſtabliſhment and continuance for ages of a government altogether miraculous, and by the preaching and miniſtry of prophets. The perſeverance of Jeſus Chriſt in his deſign, in ſpite of foreknown ſufferings, and the ſucceſs of his miniſtry notwithſtanding every human oppoſition, are ſuch proofs of his ſincerity, and of the divine authority by which he acted, as no other condition or termination of life could poſſibly have furniſhed. Had he been born, and had he lived in the midſt of human ſplendor, we could not have diſtinguiſhed the teſtimony of truth concerning him, from the artful fictions of adulation. Had he riſen from low beginnings to high eminence, it might have been ſuppoſed that the ſucceſsful progreſs of his deſign encou-

raged him to perſiſt in it. But being from his birth a child of poverty, and a man of ſorrow; living meanly; and dying, in the eyes of the world, ignominiouſly; it is not probable that he ſhould have conceived, without reaſon, ſo vaſt an undertaking; it is hardly poſſible that he ſhould have perſiſted in it; and it is morally impoſſible that, without divine aſſiſtance, the final ſucceſs ſhould have been ſuch as the world at this day bears witneſs that it was.

Shall we then continue ſo ſlow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have ſpoken concerning him?—Enough, one ſhould imagine, has been ſaid already to prevent it; but there are other arguments remaining, For,

III. If we conſider the miſſion of Chriſt Jeſus, apart from the original cauſes of its appointment, in the ſecret counſels of Omnipotence, into which I have thought it improper to enquire, it is manifeſt, that one very principal deſign in the deſcent of the Son of God to earth, was to afford a perfect example, from which mankind might learn the certain way to holineſs. In Adam all had died, in Chriſt all were to be made alive: and the ſins which by the tranſgreſſion of Adam

Adam had overſpread the world, by the pure example of Chriſt were to be checked and counteracted.

If we conſider the ſons of Adam as retaining the whole corruption of their origin, and unreformed by the example of the Redeemer, we ſhall find that againſt the very ſins moſt prevalent among them in ſuch a ſtate, the particular circumſtances of that example were directed; and that if Jeſus had not been a *man of ſorrows*, whether he might in other reſpects have been fit for his commiſſion or not, yet certainly he could not have been the proper teacher to wean men altogether from the evil and corruption of their ways, or to remove the depravity of their fallen nature.

The catalogue is rather formidable to repeat, but it will be found, I preſume, that the following vices are the leaſt that can be laid to the charge of human nature in its depraved and unconverted ſtate. *Pride, Avarice, Ambition, Contentiouſneſs, Cruelty, inordinate Love of Pleaſure, impatience of Suffering, and a general preference of the concerns of this preſent world to every other conſideration.* I do not ſay that all theſe vices were to be found in every man before the publi-

cation of the Goſpel, far otherwiſe: but I aſſert, that, both before and ſince, the depravity of nature has inclined men to be guilty of them; that, at the time of our Saviour's coming, they were very dreadfully prevalent; and that more or leſs they will prevail, while man is man, except ſo far as they are counteracted by the precepts, and yet more by the example, of the Redeemer.

Example, we well know, is the only complete confirmation of the practicability of any precepts. It may be very deſirable that ſuch virtues ſhould be poſſeſſed by man as are diametrically oppoſite to all his natural faults, but if no man ever realized the poſſeſſion of them, how can it be known that they are not of an excellence above the reach of humanity? For this cauſe did the Meſſiah of God appear in the form, and in the complete nature of a man; he was made *of like paſſions with ourſelves*, that being tempted in all things as we are, his victory might be complete, and his example perfect.—Suppoſe then that his ſtation among men had been illuſtrious, his poſſeſſions ample, and his power above reſiſtance, for ſuch was the Meſſiah whom the Jews expected; and ſuch is the picture

of

of a meſſenger from heaven which the common prejudices of men delineate to them; where ſhould *Pride*, and *Avarice*, and *Ambition*, have found their reſtraint? Might not men irrefragably have argued, that thoſe poſſeſſions muſt eſſentially be good, which the Son of God had ſanctified by his acceptance? or might they not have concluded, with an equal appearance of certainty, that if a mind of perfect purity did not decline the gratification ariſing from theſe objects, it muſt be perfectly excuſeable in common mortals to purſue them with all the ardour of deſire. The firſt conqueſt of the Redeemer was over theſe deſtructive paſſions. *Power*, *wealth*, and *pre-eminence*, in the moſt unbounded degree, were expreſsly offered to him by the enemy and ſeducer of mankind, and rejected with contempt. The evil quarter from which they were thus offered, and the ſteady rejection of them by him who was all purity, ſufficiently mark their place in the proper eſtimate of things. They may, indeed, be made the means of doing good, and then are ſanctified by the employment; but it was not conſiſtent with the plan of Redemption that Jeſus Chriſt ſhould condeſcend to do good by

inſtruments ſo frequently diſgraced by miſ-employment.

To go about daily in the conſtant and laborious exerciſe of every exalted ſpecies of benevolence; to be ſeduced by no allurements of pleaſure; to refuſe no ſufferings, however exquiſite, for the ſake of performing the taſk he had undertaken; to deſpiſe contempt, and every thing eſteemed moſt dreadful in this preſent life; to welcome even the moſt diſgraceful and abhorred mode of loſing life; remaining ſteady to the end in every virtue moſt oppoſite to the general failings of mankind; theſe were the methods ordained by the eternal wiſdom of God, and obſerved by the man Chriſt Jeſus. Thus did he, to ſhow that it was poſſible for a human creature to live devoid of *cruelty*, *contentiouſneſs*, *the love of pleaſure*, *the impatience of ſuffering*, and *the miſtaken preference of this life to the next*. If any more perfect plan can be imagined for counteracting theſe corrupt propenſities, I confeſs it is far beyond the reach of my mind to conceive it.

As it is, the rule that "the diſciple is not "better than his Lord," is ready and applicable to every difficult ſituation in which a Chriſtian can be tried. Are we poor, lowly, and

and deſpiſed among mankind? ſo was the Son of God on earth.—Are we deprived of the accommodations of life? he had not where to lay his head.—Are we oppreſſed with ſorrow, and bent down with the burden of affliction? we may hope to riſe from that eſtate to everlaſting glory and happineſs; for never was any ſorrow like unto *his* ſorrow, who from the loweſt abyſs of miſery in this world, aroſe at once to ſit for ever in the kingdom, and at the right hand of God. Can we deſpiſe our brethren for their low eſtate, when we recollect, that for the very ſame reaſon, had we lived at that day, we might have deſpiſed the Lord Chriſt Jeſus? Can we grow weary in doing good as far as our abilities extend, when we remember, that the Son of God made it his ſole occupation, and the only cauſe for calling into action his miraculous powers?

For all theſe reaſons then, namely, 1. for the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, 2. for the full and laſting proof of his miſſion, and, 3. for rendering his example perfect to mankind, we clearly can perceive and know that it was neceſſary for Chriſt to ſuffer, before he entered into his glory.—Thoſe ſufferings

the church this day calls upon us to commemorate: can we not then at ſuch a time, and indeed at all times, reſt ſatisfied with ſo many evident reaſons that are within our reach, without attempting, with preſumptuous vanity, to dive into the hidden ſources of the *primary* determination of Omnipotence?

When ſuch infinite benefits have been beſtowed, at ſuch a price, it becomes us rather to adore in humble acquieſcence, than ſeek to underſtand what, moſt probably, was never meant for our examination. And if through a falſe humility we ſhould be inclined, which is the laſt reſource of the Tempter, to fancy ourſelves unworthy of ſuch interference, or this world unworthy to be the theatre of it, let us recollect, that there is probably, though undiſtinguiſhed by us, a complete and perfect connection throughout all the works of Omnipotence.

We may reſt aſſured that the glorious diſpenſation of Redemption, in which the Deity himſelf vouchſafed to take a part, was not a ſudden expedient, nor a ſcene tranſacted in obſcurity; but planned originally in the eternal counſels of God, and deſigned not only

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for the ſalvation of men, but for the encouragement, inſtruction, and example of all beings whoſe faculties ſhould enable them to ſtudy divine wiſdom in the expanded volume of the univerſe. This aſſurance Reaſon ſuggeſts, and Revelation ſufficiently confirms.—With this perſuaſion, therefore, and with that heart-felt gratitude which the occaſion ſo eminently demands, let us now unite to commemorate the paſſion of Chriſt in the manner he himſelf appointed.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XVII.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF ONE FROM THE DEAD.

AN EASTER SERMON.

LUKE xvi. 31.

And (Abraham) ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.

MANY have been ſurpriſed at this aſſertion. It ſeems to them a hard ſaying; and they know not how to aſſent to it. Yet the proof is this day before us: for, as on this day, aroſe One from the dead: One mightier than Moſes or the Prophets, to finiſh what by them was left undone, and to perſuade men to repentance.—And are they yet perſuaded?—alas! too many are not.—Unmoved even by this awful and concluſive fact, they

they prove but too fully the aſſertion of this Goſpel: for as they hearken not to Moſes and the Prophets, ſo neither are they perſuaded though one hath actually ariſen from the dead.

Perhaps, to deſcribe prophetically this ſtate of obſtinate impenitence, and this contempt of accumulated teſtimony, might be one of the original purpoſes of the parable. Againſt the Jews, it has been ſuppoſed to be particularly directed, who having the inſtructions of Moſes and the Prophets, did not yet forſake their evil ways, and were finally prepared to reſiſt even him who was to riſe from the dead. Be this as it may, the application is at leaſt allowable; and though our Saviour ſhould not have intended to allude to ſuch offenders, his words may fairly be employed to ſhow them on what ground they ſtand.

Behold then yourſelves, ye Chriſtians, whoſoever ye are, who remain in ſin, in the very ſtate of the impenitent men deſcribed in the ſacred parable! Moſes has preached to you in vain; the warnings of the Prophets have been vain:—nay worſe; the teaching of the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts has been ſuperadded, and ſtill it is in vain; finally, the SON of GOD incarnate

nate has deſcended to the grave, and has ariſen from the dead for your conviction;—and you are unconverted! Ceaſe then to wonder at ſuppoſed hardneſs of heart attributed to the brethren of the rich man in the Goſpel; conſider rather your own hearts, deplore their obduracy, and apply, before it be too late, ſuch remedies as may render them more tractable.

"Neither *will they be perſuaded*, though "one roſe from the dead."—An important conſideration, concerning theſe words, and one on which much of the right interpretation of the parable depends, is this; *to what* they are to be perſuaded?—The anſwer to this queſtion muſt be drawn from the preceding verſe: "Nay, father Abraham, but "if one went unto them from the dead, *they* "*will repent*." It was to repentance that their brother hoped they might have been perſuaded; and it was preciſely *their repentance* of which the Patriarch deſpaired. Of the exiſtence of human creatures after death, of the rewards of the juſt, and the puniſhment of the wicked, they would undoubtedly have been perſuaded, by the teſtimony of one whom they knew to be a meſſenger from the world

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in which thoſe things are realized: but that they would therefore have been *perſuaded* to ſincere *repentance*, and to the final dereliction of their evil ways, is by no means ſo indubitable.

The truth is, and a melancholy truth for us, that the ſtrongeſt conviction imaginable of the leading truths of religion, is not always ſufficient to ſubdue our paſſions; to produce effectual repentance; and to keep us from the paths of ſin: and the recollection of this truth, explaining that aſſertion of the Patriarch which at firſt appears ſo contrary to reaſon, may ſerve, among other purpoſes, to remind us that he who taught theſe doctrines, and delivered this parable, was one who knew us better than we know ourſelves.

If we conſult the records of mankind, or the experience of our own lives, we ſhall find this aſſertion too abundantly confirmed. Our firſt parents, from the ſcriptural account of their ſituation, muſt have had undoubted knowledge and conviction that their ſtate was a ſtate of trial. They had ſtood before their Creator, and had heard from himſelf the ſentence of death denounced as the appointed puniſhment of diſobedience. Yet they forgot their

their duty, and fell. Again; the interpoſition of God could never be more manifeſt upon earth than in the viſitations of Egypt before the departure of the Iſraelites. It was impoſſible that Pharaoh could have failed to know that, by detaining that people, he provoked the wrath, and expoſed himſelf to the vengeance of an almighty adverſary: and ſo long as the terrors of the miraculous plagues were actually before his eyes, he knew his duty, and determined to perform it. Yet when the circumſtances changed, his heart changed alſo, and he returned, with an increaſed depravity, to his obdurate refuſal.—The children of Iſrael, in the wilderneſs, lived in the midſt of miracles; they ſaw the mercies of God; they ſaw his terrors; yet they tranſgreſſed repeatedly, and brought upon themſelves that vengeance, from which, by their experience and their knowledge, they ſhould have been preſerved.

If ever one man exiſted, more fully perſuaded than any other of the great truths of religion, it was king David; yet, even in him, do the faithful hiſtorians of his acts diſplay ſome melancholy inſtances of the frailty and inconſiſtency of human nature. At one time

time we find him inſpired by the Spirit of God, uniting the great offices of teacher and of prophet; at another the victim of paſſion, and hurried by it into ſuch exceſſes as he afterwards deplored in ſackcloth and aſhes, with tears and bitterneſs of ſoul.

Whoever conſiders theſe facts, will readily perceive that it would be eaſy to multiply, almoſt to any extent, theſe proofs of our poſition, *that the ſtrongeſt conviction imaginable of the leading truths of religion* is not always ſufficient to ſubdue our paſſions, or *to perſuade us to effectual repentance*. Paſſing over, therefore, hiſtorical matter, let us appeal to our own knowledge and experience, whether all they who do amiſs, and tranſgreſs the commandments of the Goſpel, do it from want of faith in that Goſpel, or from the want of any knowledge which they would acquire by the miſſion of one from the dead. Let us bring the matter yet more home, and enquire of our own hearts whether a monitor from the world of ſpirits be required to add to our internal conviction of the certainty of a future life, and of the judgments to come in it. If not;—if we are as truly perſuaded of theſe facts, as we could be by the appear-

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ance of ſuch a meſſenger,—and if we yet tranſgreſs, and yet refuſe to repent,—why doubt we of the parable? or why eſteem it a hard ſaying, that the return even of one from the dead might be inſufficient for perſuading ſinners to repentance.

That a man rouſed from his dream of ſin by ſuch a viſitation, would, while his horror and affright continued, deteſt his crimes, and determine to forſake them, will readily be granted. The effect is natural, and analogous to what takes place in many other circumſtances of warning, which are brought home to every man in various other ways. But, is it not equally natural, and equally analogous to general experience, that, as the traces of theſe ſtrong impreſſions fade, and die away, his reſolutions ſhould proportionably relax; and that ſin ſhould inſenſibly regain that empire, from which ſhe had been for a time expelled by adventitious and overpowering force?

The ſudden deaths of thoſe connected with us, or the apparent approaches of our own diſſolution, will ſometimes ſtrike our minds as forcibly, to evince the neceſſity of repentance, as it is poſſible for them to be ſtruck

by the appearance of a perſon from the dead. How ſtrongly, at theſe moments, do we feel the obligations of Religion, and the nothingneſs of all conſiderations which reſpect the preſent world alone! Yet we know, beyond a doubt, that the traces of theſe feelings, ſtrong as they may be at firſt, grow faint and diſappear; and that the very perſons who have experienced ſuch ſenſations, even in their utmoſt force, do yet return to their evil ways; and to a conduct altogether incompatible with thoſe juſt and pious feelings. Knowing this in one caſe to be poſſible, why ſhould we doubt it in another?

If ſuch be the frailty of our nature, and the unſteadineſs of our hearts, it muſt be, above all things, important, that we ſhould ſeek out means to counteract theſe evil tendencies.—Will the return of one from the dead, and the report of ſuch a witneſs, more effectually perſuade us than any other teſtimony?—Let us remember that one has actually returned from the dead: One, who, before he died, declared he would return; one, who, after his return, went not back to the place of departed ſpirits, but aſcended into heaven. What more would we require? The united

teſtimony

teſtimony of the grave, of earth, and heaven, are here compriſed. To aſk for further witneſs is only to betray the hardneſs of our hearts, and their unwillingneſs to receive the truth on any terms.

Nor ſhould it be forgotten, that for the reſurrection of Chriſt we have an evidence ſuperior, even in certainty, to that which we could have of a private miracle, of this nature, happening to ourſelves. This may ſeem at firſt a ſtrange aſſertion; yet there is great reaſon to believe it true. After the horror and tumult of mind naturally produced by an event ſo terrifying to human nature, as the appearance of a departed ſpirit, no man could, perhaps, be ſo confident of his own perceptions as not to entertain ſome little doubt whether that which he imagined himſelf to have ſeen or heard, had not been the effect of ſome temporary diſtraction, or ſome unaccountable deception. He would feel, as in extraordinary caſes men often feel, the want of ſome perſon whoſe perceptions he might compare with his own, in order to certify himſelf that he had correctly remembered what he ſaw, or was not ſtill under the dominion of a diſordered fancy. Doubts of this kind might

eaſily ariſe within himſelf, and the ſuggeſtions of others, unwilling to believe, or to allow him to believe, a fact carrying ſuch concluſions with it, would certainly increaſe ſuch doubts.

But, in the caſe of our Saviour's reſurrection, we are not referred for teſtimony to the doubtful perceptions of any ſingle perſon. Multitudes ſaw him after he aroſe from the dead, converſed with him, took refreſhment with him, touched him. Of theſe facts, the perſons concerned in them were convinced, not only while the novelty of the appearance impreſſed them with terror, and might be ſuppoſed to diſorder the judgment, but when repetition had rendered it familiar, and reſtored to them the calm and cuſtomary exerciſe of all their faculties. At diſtant periods afterwards, their recollection of theſe things continued to agree, and they mutually confirmed each other's teſtimony.

Of theſe witneſſes, undoubtedly competent, ſome have left the fact, of Chriſt's reſurrection from the dead, aſſerted in a plain and ſimple ſtyle of hiſtory; and all of them, ſo far as we can learn, continued throughout their lives, calmly, ſteadily, and uniformly to main-

tain the truth of that aſſertion. The utmoſt rage of perſecution could not move them to purchaſe eaſe, immunity, or life itſelf, by retracting, what they had ſo ſolemnly declared.

A more complete evidence of any event cannot, then, exiſt. Nor can it be denied that the united teſtimony of ſo many men ſurpaſſes, in point of certainty, that which can be afforded by the ſenſes, or recollection, of a ſingle perſon. They could compare what they had ſeen and heard, and thus confirm each other. It ſurpaſſes it alſo in another point of view. The return of a departed ſpirit could only prove to us, at moſt, that the ſoul continues to exiſt, and that it is accountable for the things done in the body: points of which few men, however they may wiſh it, can perſuade themſelves to doubt.—It might fail even in proving theſe. For, as we know not the power of ſpirits, we know not how far it may be poſſible for an evil ſpirit to aſſume a certain ſhape for the purpoſe of deceiving us. But the return of a perſon from the dead, in the body; his bodily appearance, not at one tranſient moment, but throughout the conſiderable perio of forty days, proves much more. It proves the re-union of the ſoul and body.

It confirms the whole ſyſtem of the Evangelic Revelation, and renders the idea of a deception inconceivable. The Apoſtles could not but believe what they had "ſeen, and "heard, and handled of the Word of Life *."

On this then let us reſt: and by frequently revolving in our minds the fact, let us render the belief of it ſtrong and lively, and the deduction of its important conſequences habitual.

The conſequences are theſe, according to the word of truth delivered in the ſcriptures. If Chriſt be riſen, and be the one that hath come to us from the dead, then ought we to be perſuaded to repent: then have we alſo an earneſt of our own reſurrection, and a proof of his victory over the powers of darkneſs. "If Chriſt be not riſen," ſays St. Paul, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith "alſo is vain: ye are yet in your ſins. But "now is Chriſt riſen from the dead, and be"come the firſt fruits of them who ſlept †." Thus alſo do we learn that our Saviour truly was that HOLY ONE, who, according to the Prophet, was not to ſee corruption, and by whom, at the appointed day, all men ſhall be

* 1 John i. 1. † 1 Cor. xv. 14, 20, &c.

judged,

judged. "He hath appointed," ſaith the ſame Apoſtle, "a day, in which he will judge "the world—by that man whom he hath "ordained, whereof he hath given aſſurance "unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him "from the dead *."

Nothing further ought to be required, to perſuade us to repentance, or to convince us of the neceſſity of a holy life. Nothing further would be required, were we diligent enough in impreſſing theſe truths upon our minds, and in ſoliciting the aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit to ſupport and perfect our endeavours.

Our hopes of ſalvation depend upon two things: that we be diligent to know our duty, and ſteady to perform it. For as zeal without knowledge is dangerous, ſo is knowledge, without practical zeal, deſtructive. "If we "know theſe things, happy are we if we do "them." Then ſhall not only every anniverſary of this high feſtival on earth, but alſo the diſtant day of our own reſurrection, be to us a day of joy and triumph. But if, knowing that Chriſt died for our ſins, and roſe again for our juſtification, we ſuffer that knowledge, by the cares of this world, or

* Acts xvii. 31.

the ſeductions of iniquity, to be weakened or obliterated, then are we, as was ſaid before, in that very dangerous ſtate of hard-heartedneſs at which ſome are inclined to wonder in the parable; we are not perſuaded, to any uſeful effort of repentance, either by the written revelations of God, the former or the latter, nor even by the admonitions of him whom we know to have ariſen for that purpoſe from the dead.

From a condition ſo deplorable, may what has now been ſaid contribute, by the bleſſing of God, to preſerve us all.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, from whoſe unbounded goodneſs we have received the means of eſcaping all ſpiritual evils, be aſcribed, &c. &c.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XVIII.

ON THE LAST INJUNCTIONS OF CHRIST.

WHIT-SUNDAY SERMON.

MATT. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

And Jeſus came, and ſpake unto them, ſaying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

IT is a melancholy neceſſity which God has, doubtleſs for the wiſeſt purpoſes, impoſed upon us, that at this late day we ſhould be obliged to contend for the fundamentals of our faith, as if they were of new invention; and to combat with calumnious accuſa-

accuſations, as if we had received corruptions of the Chriſtian Doctrine, inſtead of its true articles; and believed what Chriſt and his Apoſtles did not teach.

I truſt there is not one among us, who, however firmly, or however zealouſly, he may think it incumbent upon him to defend his Chriſtian Principles, ſo long as he is well perſuaded they are right, would not with joy embrace the truth, if clearly truth, by whomſoever diſcovered; and reject what could be proved to be an error, how long ſoever he might have cheriſhed it, or with whatever veneration he might have been accuſtomed to regard it. Such, at leaſt, ought to be our diſpoſition; not given to wavering, but open to conviction; attached, not bigotted; faithful, but not blindly obſtinate. But when, inſtead of light and argument, men bring us doubt and darkneſs; when, inſtead of pointing out to us the clear meaning of the ſcriptures, they diſfigure them by ſuch interpolations as ingenuity is puzzled to invent, and judgment, not perverted by prejudices, cannot receive; ſuch as the words themſelves contradict, and the whole context cries out againſt; and all this, only becauſe they

they cannot bring themſelves to think that God may tell us ſomething of himſelf which we cannot fully comprehend; when theſe are the methods taken to ſeduce us from our faith, what real Chriſtian does not feel that he is called upon to hold the faſter to the *form of ſound words* which he has received? and when many fall away through vanity or want of ſteadineſs, rather to be found among thoſe on whom the weak may lean, than thoſe that yield to ſuch an idle blaſt of vanity?

By many ſolid arguments can we repel the efforts of the aſſailants. We can appeal, not only to ſuch ſeparate paſſages of ſcripture as employ the painful ſubterfuges of our adverſaries to elude, and frequently in vain, their obvious and moſt neceſſary ſenſe, but to the general tenor of thoſe ſacred writings; the tendency of their whole plan; and the uniform current of their expreſſions from the beginning even to the end. We can appeal, not only to the early judgment of the Chriſtian church, which, in order to turn againſt us, our opponents have been abſolutely obliged to falſify, but even to that of the enemies of Chriſtianity, the Jews, whoſe ancient belief in the very doctrines objected to us, that of a Tri-

nity

nity in the Divine Nature, is as demonſtrable as any fact ſo circumſtanced can be.

For the preſent day I have choſen to confine our conſiderations to a ſingle paſſage, but that, among the moſt remarkable. The departing words of eminent perſons have ever been regarded with particular attention: theſe are, according to St. Matthew's narrative, *the final words of Chriſt*; at leaſt they are the laſt he has recorded *, and are left upon the reader to make that ſolemn ſpecies of impreſſion which ſuch words muſt naturally make. They contain the authoritative commiſſion of our Saviour to his diſciples, to ſpread his doctrine through the world, and the terms on which men were to be admitted to the benefits of that profeſſion, the initiation into which was *Baptiſm*.

This is what, if it were wanting, we ſhould lament with the utmoſt regret. Amidſt cavils and contentions raiſed on other paſſages, we ſhould very naturally ſay, "How happy "would it be, for the removal of all doubts,

* They are not the laſt in fact. This appears from the place mentioned in the context, which is a mountain in Galilee; whereas the place of our Saviour's Aſcenſion, according to St. Luke, was Bethany.

"if

"if we had ſtill the words of Chriſt, ac-
"cording to which he commanded his diſ-
"ciples to baptize their converts: the ge-
"neral form of that profeſſion to which they
"were expected to aſſent. The humility of
"Chriſt certainly would not aſſume too
"much, and if he introduced himſelf at all,
"upon that ſolemn occaſion, it would be
"undoubtedly in ſuch terms as would be
"applicable to him to the end of time, in
"their fair and genuine ſenſe, without diſ-
"ficulty, and without ambiguity."—Such things we ſhould ſuppoſe, if we had not theſe words, and the ſuppoſition would be exactly juſt, except as to the hope of terminating controverſies; which cannot be concluded by any form of words, ſo long as men continue to affix interpretations according to the wiſhes of their prejudice, not the plain deduction of their underſtanding.

There cannot be a ſtronger proof of this than is even now before us. Theſe ſolemn words of Chriſt are extant. They are not only extant, but they are undiſputed. Not like ſome other paſſages, on which there have ariſen violent controverſies, whether they exiſted in the original copies, or exiſted as they

are

are now read, or with ſuch variations as *conveniently* deſtroy their meaning: theſe words are acknowledged on all hands to have remained (all but the deductive particle ουν *therefore*, and Αμην *Amen*, of which there is ſome doubt) unaltered from the time of the Evangeliſt.—And yet there are perſons who deny the Trinity!

An eminent teacher of that ſtrange doctrine of denial has ſaid, "it is quite an arbitrary ſuppoſition that, becauſe the Father, Son and Holy Ghoſt, are mentioned together upon that occaſion, they muſt likewiſe be equal in all other reſpects *." But with what juſtice can that concluſion be called arbitrary which ruſhes involuntarily, and as it were by force, into the mind, on the mere recital of the words. "Go, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt." As far as my own conviction goes, I ſhould not heſitate to affirm that no man ever heard thoſe words, not having Socinian prejudices in his mind, or a Socinian comment in his eye, without concluding from them, as we conclude, that the three thus ſolemnly united, were meant to be marked out as ſtanding

* Prieſtley's Paſſages of Scripture Illuſtrated, p. 36.

properly together, in dignity as well as order, juſt as they are placed. No manner of diſtinction appears: of the name of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt, juſt as much is ſaid as of the name of the Father, and in the ſame way; and if the Son be, as theſe teachers would perſuade us, merely a mortal glorified, how comes it that he ſtands between God, and the Spirit of God, which Spirit, whatever they may make of it, (as ſeems to be a matter of no little doubt) certainly exiſted before him, according to their ſyſtem, and belongs peculiarly to God, ſo as to take place of all created beings.

But waving this poſition, and aſſerting only, what cannot ſurely be denied, that the words are capable of ſuch interpretation, and may happen to ſuggeſt it, let us aſk of theſe bold ſpeculators, who would reduce their Redeemer to a man, whether they will not allow him to have been a good man, a wiſe man, or a humble man? under any of which ſuppoſitions, if he were no more than man, I know not how we can defend him for interpoſing himſelf, at ſuch a time, in ſuch a mode of claſſification, between the God of heaven, and the Holy Spirit of that God.

Could

Could he not foreſee that ſuch interpretations muſt be made of words, in that caſe, ſo ambiguous? And would he not have abhorred the dreadful ſin, for ſo it would have been, of being inſtrumental to ſuch errors, by arrogating to himſelf a place ſo perfectly unfit for any human creature?

It is painful to dwell upon ſuch queſtions, and, even for argument's ſake, to make ſuppoſitions ſo repugnant to our feelings, concerning him who is our heavenly Mediator and Redeemer. The concluſion that moſt naturally ariſes is much more worthy both of him and us; that where Chriſt put *himſelf*, in this moſt ſolemn charge, there is his true place: and that if he "thought it not rob-"bery to be equal with God," it certainly was not robbery, but his eternal privilege.

Let us advert to the narrative of the Evangeliſt. He ſays that "the eleven diſciples "went away into Galilee, into a mountain "where Jeſus had appointed them. And "when they ſaw him they worſhipped him, "*but ſome doubted.*" Of what they doubted we are not told: it might be whether they ought to worſhip him, in which caſe, his immediate declaration applies directly to the ſubject

ſubject of thoſe doubts, as if he had ſaid, "be aſſured that you may worſhip me, *for* "all power is given unto me in heaven and "earth."—It ſeems, however, from the context, to be rather that they doubted at his firſt appearance, which perhaps was diſtant, whether it were he indeed; which doubt his coming near, and ſpeaking to them, muſt have removed effectually. His words were remarkable: "All power is given unto me "in heaven and earth." This, therefore, muſt have been very near the time of his aſcenſion, when he was actually received into that glory which was thus ordained for him. But from this expreſſion it has been attempted to deduce an argument againſt the pre-exiſtent power and glory of Chriſt *, by inferring that if the power was *given* him now, it was ſomething he did not poſſeſs before. True it is, that Chriſt, as man, had not been glorified before, or veſted with this power. But how did Chriſt himſelf conſider that glory when he prayed for it, immediately before his paſſion? Did he contemplate it as what henever yet poſſeſſed, or as what was his before the beginning of time? Judge ye for

* See Whitby.

yourſelves: his prayer was this:—"I have "glorified thee on earth: I have finiſhed the "work which thou gaveſt me to do: and "now, O Father, glorify thou me, *with* "*thine own ſelf, with the glory which I had* "*with thee before the world was* *." So is it in St. John's Goſpel; and doubtleſs Chriſt may be believed concerning himſelf, rather than thoſe who, commenting upon one part of his words, overlook or forget what he has declared ſo fully in another. It requires, indeed, a very little knowledge of the cuſtomary language of the Goſpel to recollect, that, as a man, Chriſt is conſidered there as purchaſing his exaltation by obedience; though, as God, he laid down his glory voluntarily, and choſe to take upon him the form and duties of a ſervant: he ſtripped himſelf of power, and purchaſed it again in his new character of man. And what power was it that was given to him? Nothing trifling; or very ſuitable to the faculties of a mere man to receive: nothing leſs than *omnipotence*: "*all power* both in heaven and "earth."—We cannot eaſily conceive that mere humanity could be made, by any means,

* John xvii. 4, 5.

a fit

a fit recipient for ſuch a charge. The Son of God, the brightneſs of his Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon, might well ſuſtain the infinite weight of this authority, a power extending, as the expreſſions denote, not only over men but angels; it is ſuited to his nature, it is fitted to his dignity. But a created Being, of whatever excellence, muſt ſink beneath it. One attribute of the Godhead without the reſt, Omnipotence, without infinity of Wiſdom, Juſtice, Goodneſs, would be pernicious both to him who had it, and to all that were made ſubject to it: and if all theſe were given, the Being gifted thus would be made a God, and would be all by exaltation, that Chriſt was by eternal right. The queſtion then returns to this dilemma. If *all power* was given to Chriſt, either he was formed originally to receive it, a Being by dignity of nature fitted for it; or he was made fit to hold it, by the addition of thoſe attributes he had not in himſelf: and it is ſurely eaſier to conceive that what he poſſeſſed he laid aſide, for temporary reaſons of benevolence, than that having nothing, but what is common to humanity, he ſhould be exalted to partake the attributes and power of God.

It is true that this concluſion depends upon the interpretation of the words *all power*; if they mean not omnipotence the argument is not valid; but for that interpretation let us go to the other ſcriptural paſſages wherein that power is deſcribed. St. Paul ſays that it "was far above all principality, and power, and "might, and dominion, and every name that "is named, not only in this world, but alſo "in that which is to come *." And St. Peter ſays of Chriſt, that he "is gone into heaven, "and is on the right-hand of God, *Angels*, "and *Authorities*, and *Powers* being made "ſubject to him †;" and in the book of Revelation he is ſtyled "King of kings, and "Lord of lords ‡," &c.—This is very like *omnipotence*. A degree of exaltation little ſuited to any created Being, but exactly appropriated to him of whom the Apoſtle ſays, that "By him were all things created that "are in heaven, and that are in earth, viſible "and inviſible, whether they be thrones or "dominions, or principalities, or powers, all "things are created *by* him, and for him."

* Eph. i. 21. † 1 Pet. iii. 22. ‡ Chap. xvii. 14.

Having

Having thus announced his power, our Saviour proceeds to iſſue his commands. "Go therefore, ſays he, and teach all na-"tions, baptizing them in the name of the "Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy "Ghoſt."—This follows now conſiſtently and well. All power being given him, it was very juſt and right that he ſhould ſhare the honour, whom the Father had admitted to a ſhare of his authority: and the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, are connected in apparent equality; not as agents infinitely different in the common work of Redemption, (which would be abſurd,) but as three co-operating powers of the ſame tranſcendent dignity; united to do that, which no inferior beings could effect.—This is what the words ſuggeſt; what the preceding words explain; and thoſe that follow finally confirm.

Our Saviour adds. "Teaching them to "obſerve all things whatſoever *I have* com-"manded you." This proof of authority ſavours, like all the reſt, of that high power we juſtly attribute to the ſpeaker of it. His commands were to be the Religion of the world. The commands of God may well be

ſo: the commands of a man could hardly claim ſuch weight. But, not to lay more ſtreſs on this than it requires, let us come to his concluding words. "And lo, I am with "you always, even to the end of the world." —Here is another attribute of the Deity aſſerted, *Omnipreſence*: according to what our Saviour at another time declared, "For where "two or three are gathered together in my "name, I am in the midſt of them *."

The viſible preſence of our bleſſed Saviour was now nearly at an end: he was about to depart from his diſciples, that the Comforter might be ſent, to complete the holy ſyſtem, by enlightening their minds, and leading them into all truth:—but he tells them, ere he goes, that he is ſuch a maſter as, though abſent, will be preſent with them: neither reſtricted by place or time; and that under his protection they, and all his church, will continue, to the end of the world. With this declaration, ſo very important to every believer in Chriſt, St. Matthew ſuddenly and abruptly concludes his Goſpel: meaning, evidently, to leave it impreſſed upon the minds of his readers, in a manner the moſt forcible,

* Matt. xviii. 20,

What

What Chriſt ſaid, or what he did on earth, after uttering this divine promiſe, he hath not recorded; becauſe, that Chriſt would be an everlaſting protector to his church, though abſent in the body, preſent in ſpirit and in power, was moſt material to be known, and to be remembered. To other hiſtorians he left the care of delivering the particulars of their bleſſed Maſter's aſcenſion; his object ſeems to have been to fix attention to theſe, the moſt important of his parting words, by thus concluding with them: ſo as to inſpire, towards Chriſt, hope, confidence, gratitude, and adoration. The ſingle word, *Amen*, ſubjoined in all the beſt copies of this Goſpel *, throws a ſtill greater ſolemnity over the whole paſſage. It has the force and meaning of a prayer for the confirmation of thoſe good tidings. "*So be it*, Lord, as thou haſt ſaid: "be thou with us to the end of the world, "our everlaſting and almighty protector!"

What the Apoſtles, and from them the primitive church, thought of the final injunctions

* Grieſbach marks it as probably to be omitted, but the beſt authority he cites for it is the Beza M.S. at Cambridge; and I think the reaſons for retaining it are ſtronger than any proof that can be drawn from that accidental deficiency.

of our Saviour, thus ſolemnly delivered, is manifeſt from the uſe made of them. His words "Go, and teach all nations, baptizing "them in the name of the Father, and of "the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt," became not only the eſtabliſhed form of baptiſm, but the ſubſtance of the creed, or profeſſion of faith, required of converts who were to be admitted to that rite; and the foundation of all ſubſequent creeds which aroſe out of that form. As far as we can collect from the beſt authorities, the earlieſt form of profeſſion, was ſimply this, "*I believe in God the Father* "*Almighty, and in Jeſus Chriſt his only Son,* "*and in the Holy Ghoſt* *." As hereſies ſprung up, and multiplied in the church, other articles were ſeparately inſerted from time to time, in order to counteract this or that error: and theſe additions may be more properly conſidered as explanations of the ſenſe in which the church received the original articles, than any independent matter. Thus whatever might have been the intention of our Saviour in giving this command, the immediate conſequence of it was the impoſition of a double bond upon his church;

* King's Crit. Hiſt. of Apoſt. Creed, p. 38.

a ſolemn

a ſolemn form of words uſed in the moſt indiſpenſable rite of his Religion; and a ſolemn profeſſion of faith to be declared by all who ſhould deſire to be admitted into it. Knowing his conſummate wiſdom, we cannot but conclude that he foreſaw this conſequence, and intended that it ſhould ariſe. With reſpect to the form of baptiſm his words, indeed, convey an actual inſtitution of it, and accordingly, in very early times, we find it aſſerted by Chriſtian writers, that baptiſm adminiſtered in any other form would not be valid: as in the name of the Father and Holy Ghoſt without the Son, or any other partial method *: and that the catechumens ſhould profeſs their faith in thoſe very names in which they were to be admitted Chriſtians, was natural, and almoſt unavoidable.

By what means any men perſuade themſelves that at this late day we can have better knowledge on theſe points than was enjoyed in the time of the Apoſtles, it is not eaſy to conceive. The profeſſion of faith, if faith it can be called, of many at this day who ſtill

* There have been, however, diſputes on this. See Bingham, Vol. I. Eccl. Antiq.

retain

retain the name of Chriſtians, ſhould be: "I believe in God the Father; I deny the "Son; and I explain away the Holy Ghoſt." Whether this is ſuch a creed as would have obtained baptiſm from an Apoſtle, and the impoſition of thoſe holy hands which at that time conveyed miraculous gifts, we cannot judge more properly than after this conſideration of our Saviour's words.

It is a contemplation full of melancholy to reflect that at this day, ſuch is the infatuation ariſing from the pride of human knowledge, even wiſe and good men have, in many inſtances, fallen into this moſt ſtrange apoſtacy. The words of Scripture, the traditions of the Church, the long eſtabliſhed forms and practices of Chriſtians in every quarter of the world, all muſt yield to that inflexible reaſon, as they think it, preſumption as it rather ſeems to be, which refuſes to receive a myſtery, even at the hand of God. How long it may pleaſe the almighty wiſdom to ſuffer this great evil to ſubſiſt, this great apoſtacy to be ſupported, we cannot poſſibly foreſee. While it remains, it certainly is intended for the trial of that faith and ſteadineſs, which ought to be in thoſe who hold the uncor-

rupted

rupted doctrines of the Goſpel, immoveable. It probably will happen in this, as in many other caſes, that when ingenious men have made full trial of every art and ſubtilty they can deviſe, to maintain a faith adapted to their private wiſhes, rather than to the truth of Revelation, and it ſhall have been ſhown, by ſucceſſive ſteps, that every ground they can aſſume for ſuch a purpoſe is perfectly untenable, their opinions will die away, and fall into oblivion. In the mean time, as long as any thing new, of fair appearance, ſpecious in contrivance, and flattering to the vanity of man, can be produced, they will, they muſt, continue to deceive themſelves, and to ſeduce unſtable minds into the ſnare. Let us, whom God has bleſt, as we confide, with better knowledge, be watchful therefore and ſtand firm; praying moſt earneſtly to him, for ourſelves, that he will preſerve us from thoſe dangers; and for thoſe who are unhappily entangled with them, that their minds may be enlightened, or their errors pardoned.

Now to this ever-bleſſed Trinity, to God the Father, &c.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XIX.

ON MYSTERIES.

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1 COR. II. 7.

WHAT the wisdom of man can perform in great things, when exerted in its proper sphere, it would be absurd and unjust to deny; but it seems not to be any derogation from the powers of that wisdom, whatever they may be, to affert, that beyond its natural limits it cannot act at all; and, consequently, that it never could by any efforts or any investigation have discovered,

DISCOURSE XIX.

ON MYSTERIES IN RELIGION.

TRINITY SERMON.

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1 COR. ii. 6, 7.

Howbeit we ſpeak wiſdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wiſdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought, but we ſpeak the wiſdom of God in a myſtery.

THAT the wiſdom of man can perform great things, when exerted in its proper ſphere, it would be abſurd and uſeleſs to deny; but it ſeems not to be any derogation from the powers of that wiſdom, whatever they may be, to aſſert, that beyond its natural limits it cannot act at all; and, conſequently, that it never could by any efforts or any inveſtigation have diſcovered, without divine

divine aſſiſtance, the nature, or any of the hidden counſels of God. The being and the wiſdom of the Deity are indeed to be diſcovered by their perceptible effects in the creation; but where ſuch effects are wanting, man's power of inveſtigation muſt altogether ceaſe. Whatever therefore, reſpecting God, and his deſigns, is not made known to us by any ſuch effect as our faculties are able to diſcern, muſt lie for ever hidden from us, unleſs imparted by actual revelation from above. Nor does it appear to be any thing different from what we might naturally expect, that, when thoſe truths have been revealed, which our reaſon could not ever have inveſtigated, we ſhould ſtill remain as unable to comprehend their nature, as we were before to diſcover their exiſtence. This we find to happen in other caſes. A man by defect of nature blind, may be convinced by teſtimony that there is a ſubſtance called light; but whatever may be the ſtrength of his conviction, from a reliance on the veracity of thoſe who aſſert it, he muſt, we know, for ever remain ignorant of the true nature of that ſubſtance, the exiſtence of which he was from his birth incapable of diſcerning.

diſcerning. Whatever he can learn reſpecting it, he muſt take implicitly upon truſt, and can neither reaſon nor decide for himſelf, on a matter of which his own faculties afford him no experience or information. It muſt ſeem to him impoſſible that any ſubſtance ſhould convey to us the knowledge of things very diſtant, or to his apprehenſion abſent, except ſo far as he may be able to collect from the analogy of ſound. Yet if he refuſe to believe what they whoſe faculties are perfect ſolemnly aſſert concerning light, we ſhould juſtly accuſe him of an obſtinacy in no ſmall degree perverſe and reprehenſible.

Much of the ſame kind, but with additional aggravations, muſt appear to ſuperior beings the reſiſtance made by the pride and corruption of man to the myſterious truths imparted by the Chriſtian Revelation. It muſt be a ſight diſgraceful in the higheſt degree to humanity: for what can be more contemptible than ignorance which refuſes to be taught, and folly which imagines itſelf wiſe?

As a ſlight difference in the mode of conſidering a queſtion ſometimes greatly facilitates our conception of it, let us endeavour

to

to put ourſelves in the place of thoſe higher orders of creatures, which we ſuppoſe able to contemplate our conduct.—Let us imagine that there are offered to our conſideration two Beings, which, ſetting aſide all other diſtinctions in their nature, have this remarkable difference, that the one is pre-eminent and conſummate in knowledge, incapable of falſehood or error: the other groſsly ignorant even of many things which it moſt concerns him to know; perplexed in the ſearch of truth by darkneſs which he cannot diſſipate, and liable, through various infirmities, to wander even in the fulleſt and the cleareſt light. Should the ſuperior of thoſe beings at any time condeſcend to enlighten and inſtruct the inferior, with what temper ſhould we expect ſuch valuable admonitions to be received? with gratitude, joy, and reliance? or, with pride, petulance, and diſcontent? with a diſpoſition to cavil, or a diſpoſition to truſt? with docile attention, or with pertinacious adherence to ignorance and error?—Could we, unconcerned in it ourſelves, be made ſpectators of ſuch a ſcene, with what admiration and love ſhould we behold on the one hand diſplayed a patient and perſevering goodneſs,

unwearied

unwearied even by ingratitude, for ever ready to inſtruct, to aſſiſt, and to pardon; and on the other, with what indignation and ſtrong contempt ſhould we regard an obſtinacy which no perſuaſion could remove; and a ſullen, ſtupid pride, which, though unable to direct itſelf, refuſed to be conducted; chooſing rather to remain untaught, than to confeſs an ignorance at the ſame time undeniable.

If this latter picture ſtrike us as unamiable, as even deteſtable, can we wonder that it is a part of the great deſign of Providence to bring us to a better diſpoſition? There are few things, as we are taught by the ſcriptures, more offenſive to God than the pride and ſelf-ſufficiency of man. Indeed when we conſider what man is, how limited in his faculties, how confined in his knowledge, how fallible in the beſt exertions of his reaſon, that he ſhould have any pride towards God is an abſurdity, which, if it were not ſo highly criminal, would be no leſs eminently ridiculous. The beſt and wiſeſt of mankind have felt this truth, and have therefore been generally of all men, the leaſt opiniated, the moſt humble, diffident, and teachable.

St. Paul declares expreſsly, in my text, that the wiſdom he taught was not the wiſdom of men; not ſuch as could be acquired by their experience, or deduced by their reaſonings; but a very different thing; the wiſdom of God, and that enveloped in myſtery.

Now a myſtery has been properly defined to be a truth revealed, which our natural reaſon could not have diſcovered, nor when declared is able to comprehend.

That ſuch truths ſhould be found among the divine declarations concerning Religion cannot be eſteemed ſurpriſing, when we conſider that the whole of Religion is converſant in topics very diſproportionate to the ſtrength and comprehenſion of the human mind. Even our own ſpeculations upon this ſublime ſubject, preſently lead to particulars which we are not able to comprehend. Almoſt all the expreſſions by which we convey to each other our imperfect conceptions of the divine nature, are of a negative kind, and conſequently are ſo many manifeſt confeſſions of our ignorance; for to deſcribe any object merely by ſaying what it is not, is to ſhow, moſt evidently, that we are far from being able to impart a real knowledge of it. We ſay of the Deity

that

that he is *uncreated*, *infinite*, *immenſe*, *unchangeable*, and theſe things we conſtantly, and indeed truly, aſſert: but what are theſe aſſertions? they mean only that the Being to whom they are applied did not derive his origin from any other; was not created; is not, as we are, confined by certain limits; capable of being eſtimated by certain meaſures; or liable to become at one time any thing eſſentially different from what he is at another. But we do not by theſe deſcriptions comprehend any better than before what he is at any time; nor do we acquire, by their aſſiſtance, any kind of idea what it is, or how it can be poſſible, to have exiſted at all times without a prior cauſe, or to be preſent at all times in every place.

Nor do we make any further advance towards the acquiſition of exact ideas when we diſcover and declare that God is a Spirit.—There is not indeed in the origin of the word Spirit any thing of a negative kind, but in our uſage it is wholly ſo. In its primary ſignification in moſt languages (and many have wonderfully conſented to uſe it alike) it means only *air* or *wind*; but this we know we do not mean; for air we know to be a ſubſtance

as truly corporeal as earth, or any thing more ſolid, though differently modified as to its ſenſible properties; or, in other words, ſo formed and conſtituted as to make a different impreſſion on our organs. The word *Spirit* therefore in this application is only figuratively uſed, and is of force merely to deny the preſence of the corporeal nature. Whatever is not body or matter we call Spirit; and ſhould have exactly as definite ideas concerning it if we uſed the words *not Body*, as we have by ſubſtituting the equivalent term *Spirit*. Thus completely are we loſt in ſpeculations of a refined nature, not only before we come to divine Revelation, but even before we quit the contemplation of ourſelves; for our own ſpirit, by which our body is animated, is quite as incomprehenſible to us, as any other ſpirit in the univerſe, and the term as negative in that uſage as in any other; for when we ſay there is a ſpirit within us, we mean only that there is ſomething within us which is not body, or not of corporeal ſubſtance.

Such is man's wiſdom, with reſpect to truths which he is able to diſcover for himſelf. Beyond theſe muſt lie much knowledge,

of

of which if it pleaſe God, for wiſe ends of his government, to impart certain particulars, is it likely that man ſhould be able to trace or to diſcover one tittle beyond what is diſcloſed? He who knows not what a ſpirit is, not even that ſpirit which lives within him, or how it is connected with his body, can he expect to find out in what manner, or by what ineffable ſpecies of communication, the divine ſpirits of Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, are joined in everlaſting Unity?

Had this queſtion been ſeriouſly conſidered, it might, in different ages of the world, have prevented much of uſeleſs, and much of very dangerous ſpeculation.—This, however, did not happen.

At the very entrance, as it were, of Chriſtianity, that is, even in the form of admiſſion preſcribed by its Founder, was clearly ſeen the revelation of a triple nature in the Deity. Converts were ordered to be baptized in the name of the *Father*, and of the *Son*, and of the *Holy Ghoſt*; names ſo arranged, without the ſlighteſt mark of difference or inequality, as to make it impoſſible that plain reaſon ſhould fail to conclude that they all bore in ſome reſpect the ſame relation to the Chriſ-

tian, and were equally entitled to his adoration.—In peruſing the Goſpels and apoſtolical Epiſtles, the convert could not fail to meet with a great abundance of paſſages, all tending to confirm the ſame fact: quite enough to regulate his faith concerning it, and to aſcertain the nature of the worſhip he was required to pay.

But he might at the ſame time have obſerved, what is little leſs remarkable, that of all the inſpired writers, not one attempts to reveal, or even to enquire into the nature and manner of what is thus diſcovered concerning the Almighty; and therefore he might reaſonably have concluded, that no indulgence was intended to be given to a curioſity of this kind. This concluſion, however, was not drawn; and a conſtant employment of Chriſtians, for a long continuance of time, was the attempting to define and to explain in what manner the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, were united and related to each other. Every man had a theory, and every one a diſtinction of his own, producing an endleſs variety of new and fanciful terms, many of which were drawn from conſiderations ſo ſubtile as hardly could be ſaid to be underſtood

ſtood even by the inventors of them: and what was worſe, producing a great decay of Chriſtian charity; and multiplying the reproaches and the puniſhments of hereſy on a thouſand frivolous occaſions. Yet thus the pride of man was gratified: for to that pride the invention of terms to conceal his ignorance, proves often little leſs ſatisfactory than an actual advancement in knowledge; the one being, for the moſt part, miſtaken for the other.

As ſoon as the memory and evidence of what the Apoſtles themſelves had taught on this ſubject were ſufficiently weakened to admit of ſuch an attempt, the pride and fancied wiſdom of man ſought out another expedient. That there might not be any occaſion for confeſſions of ignorance, ſome men were found who boldly denied all thoſe obſcure doctrines which they could not ſucceed in explaining. This was cutting the knot; but it was cutting away at the ſame time the roots of much real knowledge, and reducing language, the inſtrument by which all knowledge is communicated, to ſuch a ſtate of uncertainty as makes it difficult to ſay in what caſe we can have dependence on it. If the texts

ſo often alledged to prove the Divinity of our Saviour and of the Holy Ghoſt are not deciſive, words can ſurely have no power to convey a clear propoſition. If we are to ſuffer ourſelves to be perſuaded that "the Word "which was in the beginning was with "God, and *was* God," was, nevertheleſs, *not* in the beginning, and was *not* God; how ſhall we invent an aſſertion which may not be explained away?—Or if the interpretation of his name Immanuel—*God with us*—ſignify not, that he who was with us was God,—how ſhall we define the ſignification of any expreſſions we can uſe?—The ſame may be ſaid in a great variety of inſtances, of which that already alluded to, the ſolemn formula of baptiſm, may be noticed as moſt comprehenſive: for if baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, can be interpreted, conſiſtently with reaſon, ſo that the three perſons therein mentioned ſhall have no kind of equality or connection; nay, ſo that one of them ſhall be no perſon at all, but only a term deſcriptive of ſome quality or qualities of the firſt; I know not to what good purpoſe any form could ſerve, when the

the meaning even of the plaineſt may be ſo different from what it ſeems.

For avoiding all theſe errors what is the moſt ſecure direction?—to remember the words of St. Paul; that the wiſdom preached by the Apoſtles was not the wiſdom of this world, but a very different wiſdom, the wiſdom of God, and that profeſſedly myſterious: conſequently ſuch as cannot be laid open and explained by human intellect, further than it has pleaſed him to reveal it; nor can ever be ſo properly expreſſed, as in the very words of ſcripture: to attempt to remove the myſtery from it, by new terms or explanations, is either to waſte our labour in fruitleſs endeavours, or to reject what is revealed: which while it remains unaltered muſt for ever continue myſterious.

Concerning theſe ſublime doctrines, a diſtinction has been made well calculated to reconcile the mind to their difficulties, and undoubtedly juſt in its principle; namely, that though *ſuperior* to human reaſon, they are not *contradictory* to it. The grounds of this diſtinction ſome indeed have diſputed, but with more zeal for oppoſition than ſolidity of argument: for no two things can

ſurely

ſurely be more truly ſeparate and diſtinguiſhable *than not to comprehend how a thing may be*, and clearly to comprehend that it cannot be*; the former of which is the caſe of things above reaſon; the latter, of thoſe which are contradictory to it. In the one inſtance we want knowledge, and reaſon remains inactive; in the other we have a poſitive knowledge, and can ſee a contradiction, and repugnance, which reaſon is authoriſed to reject, and indeed unable to admit.

So far is it from being impoſſible that divine wiſdom ſhould communicate truths, the nature of which we cannot comprehend, that human inveſtigation itſelf leads occaſionally to truths thus circumſtanced. It is ſolidly proved by mathematical reaſoning, that lines and ſpaces are infinitely diviſible, and that certain lines are of ſuch a nature as for ever to approach, yet never to meet each other. Theſe things cannot be denied without making Reaſon contradictory to herſelf, for they are founded on correct demonſtrations, to which ſhe cannot but aſſent; yet how they can be true we may for ever vainly enquire.—Thus that there ſhould be in the

* See Norris on Reaſon and Faith.

Divine

Divine Nature three perſons, or differences, is what our reaſon cannot contradict, becauſe concerning the mode of exiſtence of the Supreme Being, our reaſon has no knowledge, nor can form any kind of deciſion: it is a matter altogether above our comprehenſion; whereas, could we deny it, it muſt be in ſome degree level to our knowledge, for ſo much, at leaſt, we muſt know, that what was aſſerted of it could not be true. In the terms there is no contradiction, for it is never ſaid that *three Perſons* are one Perſon, or that three Gods are one God; but that the three Perſons diſtinguiſhed by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, are ſo united everlaſtingly, as to be properly and truly *One God*. Which, as we cannot comprehend, till it ſhall pleaſe God to reveal himſelf more fully to us, ſo let us never have the preſumption to doubt, as long as it ſtands expreſſed ſo very clearly in what he has already revealed. If Revelation can only be explained by ſubtilties and refinements which deſtroy all the common effect of words, it cannot be well adapted to the general uſe of mankind. But if no more is required than to believe that God may have revealed ſome things which, from their

their ſublime nature, it is vain and preſumptuous to attempt explaining, we may ſurely continue to pray as we have been taught, and particularly on this day, to the adorable and incomprehenſible Trinity, rejoicing, in the words of St. Paul, that "through Chriſt, "we have acceſs by the Spirit, to the Fa-"ther *."

* Eph. ii. 18.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XX.

ON THE TITLE OF *The LORD*, AS A PROOF OF CHRIST'S DIVINITY.

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

LUKE ii. 11.

For unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Chriſt the Lord.

THE dignity and high pre-eminence of Jeſus, above all that ever bore the form of man, is marked in various periods of his hiſtory, but in none more ſtrikingly than in the commencement and concluſion of his earthly courſe. On theſe occaſions angels became viſible to men, and, by their interference, ſhowed that the inhabitants of heaven delighted to attend him, and to do him honour. He came from heaven, and he returned to it again;

again; and their appearance at theſe periods proves that what to man was ſo important, was not indifferent to the perfect ſpirits that reſide in bliſs: that his deſcent to earth was worthy of their joy, his reaſcent to heaven of their approach and miniſtration. They waited on him as inferiors, as the ſcriptures teſtify in various ways. "When God bring-"eth in the firſt-begotten into the world," according to the Apoſtle, "he ſaith, Let all "the angels of God worſhip him *."

The angels worſhipped Chriſt. By what preſumption ſome men think themſelves more wiſe than angels, or more exalted, and refuſe to worſhip him, 'tis hard to ſay. They tell us it is idolatry. Gracious God! from ſuch idolatry as is performed by thoſe immortal ſpirits that ſurround thy throne, may we be never free!—The hoſts of heaven fall down, not only before "him *that ſitteth on the* "*throne*," but "before *the Lamb*."—This worſhip then is pure enough for them; and is it not for man? Preſumptuous, vain refinement!—But the book that tells us this is ſpurious. So ſay the objectors: for all is ſpurious that accords not with the notions

* Heb. i. 6.

men reſolve to hold. Let us then wave its authenticity, at leaſt for the preſent, and recur to St. Luke, whoſe words are not diſputed.

The teſtimony of angels concerning our Saviour, and their miniſtration at the time of his nativity, are by that Evangeliſt recorded. The words of my text are, as you know, a part of that declaration which the firſt angel that appeared, delivered to the ſhepherds. Beſides announcing to thoſe favoured men the fact, the glorious fact, that he was born, according to the prophecies, *in the city of David*, they alſo tell his dignity, in words that were not then obſcure, whatever they may now be made, by thoſe who will not own their obvious acceptation.

The holy child is there deſcribed by three ſuch titles as a Jew at that day muſt have inſtantly referred to their right ſenſe: they were all appropriate terms, connected with ideas aſcertained and known; they could not be miſtaken. *A Saviour, Chriſt, the Lord.*

Of theſe three titles the laſt interprets the two former, at leaſt explains their dignity; for could a doubt ariſe what perſon ſhould be Chriſt and Saviour, *the Lord* is ſuch a name

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as points it out at once. For though "there "be gods many, and lords many," as the Apoſtle ſays, that are ſo called improperly, yet to him who knows the ſcripture there is one Lord only, the Lord of heaven and earth. —This term is plain to all of us, at leaſt it ſhould be ſo; and that I may do my part to clear the point to thoſe who hear me, I have choſen this for the chief topic of the preſent day's diſcourſe; endeavouring ſo to illuſtrate and explain the word, that I may leave on other minds as little doubt as reſts upon my own. If plain and direct reaſon can effect it, which I dare not queſtion, the taſk will not be difficult.

What, let me aſk you, would have been your notion of our Saviour's dignity, had this been the concluſion of the angelic meſſage, "a Saviour, which is Chriſt, *Jehovah?*" Yet ſo in fact it is, if words eſtabliſhed as equivalent may be ſubſtituted for each other. In Greek, the language of the ſecond covenant, and, by adoption, of the firſt, (ſince Chriſt and his Apoſtles often quote the Septuagint) the ſacred name *Jehovah* does not occur. For it, in that language, are always ſubſtituted, the Greek words that mean *the*

Lord

Lord (ὁ Κυριος), which thereby gain a force that otherwiſe they might not have had, but one as definite and fixed as uſe can render any thing. The ſacred language employed in that tranſlation being current among the Jews when the Apoſtles wrote, it was adopted by them; and *the Lord* in the New Teſtament is as direct a ſubſtitute for that great name that was revealed to Moſes, as it is in the Greek tranſlation of the Bible. A ſuperſtition of the Jews concerning the pronouncing of the name *Jehovah*, firſt occaſioned the ſubſtitution of *the Lord* in its place; but that being once eſtabliſhed, the ſubſtituted name was equally intelligible, and conveyed the ſame idea: and if the language of the angel correſponded exactly with that of the Evangeliſt, as we may be aſſured it did, the ſhepherds doubtleſs underſtood it ſo.

I maintain then that no more direct intimation of our Saviour's divinity could have been given, than was furniſhed by the application of this title to him: a name by which the God of Iſrael had long been known, in diſtinction from all other gods; a name repeated, times innumerable, in the ancient ſcriptures, as belonging to the true God, and

to him excluſively. "I am *the Lord*, that "is my name, and my glory will I not give "to another *." So ſays he by the mouth of Iſaiah; and again by that of Jeremiah; "I will cauſe them to know my hand, and "my might, and they ſhall know that my "name is *the Lord* †." Pharaoh, who was an alien, might ſay, "Who is *the Lord*, "that I ſhould obey his voice ‡?" But the people of Iſrael, to a man, knew what was intended when Elijah propoſed to them the alternative, "If *the Lord* be God follow him, "but if Baal, then follow him;" and accordingly when conviction was forced at length upon them, by the miraculous conſumption of the ſacrifice, their univerſal exclamation was, "*the Lord* he is the God, *the Lord* he "is the God ‖."—In theſe paſſages, and very many others, the original Hebrew has *Jehovah*; but *the Lord* (firſt ſubſtituted for it in reading, through reſpect,) was preſerved alſo in tranſlations, and was known as fully to imply the ſame as if the name Jehovah had been pronounced.

* Iſai. xlii. 8. † Jer. xvi. 21. ‡ Exod. v. 2.
‖ 1 Kings xviii. 21 & 39.

Indeed,

Indeed, without being apprized of this uſage, the import of the term itſelf appears ſufficiently deciſive. *The* Lord is not a title applicable to a mortal. Whatever be the number of thoſe to whom the name of lord may be applicable, *the Lord*, by way of eminence, can have but one ſignification. It implies ſupreme dominion, in a degree which can belong to him alone to whom all other powers are ſubject; and is the ſame whether employed alone, or, what is no leſs frequent, in union with *God*. The Lord God, or the Lord our God.

We may then be perfectly aſſured that Jeſus Chriſt, the humble and the meek, veiled in the weakneſs of mortality, and patient in the loweſt ſtate of mortal humiliation, would neither have aſſumed this title, nor have ſuffered it to be applied to him, had it not belonged to him of right. His own argument with the Phariſees concerning the dignity of Chriſt turned upon the force of this expreſſion. "He is "called *Lord*, ſaid he, by David in the ſpirit, "how then is he the ſon of David?" The Lord of David thus inſpired muſt have been a perſon far above him, and not in ſtrict propriety his Son, though called ſo in a partial view, with

reference to that worldly lineage from which he ſhould proceed as man.—But more directly yet, does Chriſt aſſert his claim to be addreſſed as Lord, and even that excluſive claim, which the unity of the Godhead authorizes. Thus he ſaid to his diſciples, "Be "ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Maſ-"ter, *even Chriſt.*"—And again, "Neither "be ye called Maſters, for *one* is your Maſ-"ter, even *Chriſt* *."—Maſter is here equivalent to *Lord*, and is applied by Chriſt to himſelf excluſively, though in an intermediate clauſe of his diſcourſe he ſpeaks of the "*one Father* which is in heaven," who doubtleſs muſt be *Maſter* alſo, were not the union of the two ſo perfect that they are both, with the Holy Spirit, but one Lord, and one Maſter.—In another ſcripture he ſays, "Ye call "me *Maſter and Lord:* and ye ſay well; "for ſo I am †." More than once he declared, "not every one that calleth me "*Lord, Lord*, ſhall enter into the kingdom "of heaven;" allowing, however, that as far as that might go, the reſpect of giving him his proper title would in ſome degree be meritorious. As if he had ſaid, "It is very "well and right to call me Lord, for ſo I

* Matt. xxviii. 8. † John xiii. 13.

"am,

" am, but that is not ſufficient. Reſpect in " words will not obtain ſalvation, unleſs in " actions alſo ye expreſs ſubmiſſion." On this very principle he aſks with an implied reproach, " Why call ye me Lord, Lord, " and do not the things I ſay *?" exactly as the prophetic ſpirit had enquired by Malachi, " If I be *a Maſter*, where is my fear, ſaith " the Lord of Hoſts †?"

Thus authorized, the diſciples and apoſtles of our Saviour, inſpired alſo, and led into all truth by the influence of the Holy Spirit, uniformly called him *the Lord*. The Lord's-day, ſo early adopted as the title of the Chriſtian Sabbath, ſignified the day of Chriſt; the day in which he roſe from the grave triumphant over ſin and death. The apoſtolic writers even aſſert that he is the only Lord. " To us," ſays St. Paul, " there is but one " God the Father, of whom are all things, and " we in him; and *one Lord* Jeſus Chriſt, by " whom are all things, and we by him ‡." Again, " There is *one Lord*, one faith, one " baptiſm ‖." In another place the ſame Apoſtle declares it to be the purpoſe of God,

* Luke vi. 46. † Mal. i. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. viii. 6. ‖ Eph. iv. 5.

"That at the name of Jeſus, every knee "ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things "in earth, and things under the earth, and "that every tongue ſhould confeſs that Jeſus "Chriſt is *Lord*, to the glory of God the "Father *."—So truly juſt and right is this expreſſion, that in another place St. Paul declares the uſe of it to prove ſome portion at leaſt of the divine Spirit: and "that no man "can ſay," (that is, ſincerely ſay, and in the ſenſe of adoration) "that Jeſus is *the Lord*, "but by the Holy Ghoſt."—Soon after which he informs us, that though there be differences of miniſtries, there is only one and "the ſame Lord †." In another paſſage he ſays, "the ſecond man is *the Lord* from "heaven ‡."

Yet though the ſacred writers thus declare that Chriſt alone is Lord, yet do they often uſe the ſame expreſſion to ſpeak of God the Father: an apparent inconſiſtency, which could not be accounted for, did we not know, what they have taught in various ways, that in the threefold ſeparation of the Godhead there is a perfect union. That though the

* Philip. ii. 10, 11. † 1 Cor. xii. 3, 5.
‡ 1 Cor. xv. 47.

Father

Father is not the Son, nor the Son Father, nor the Holy Ghoſt to be confounded with either, yet they all form but *one God, and one Lord.*

The truth appears to be, as indeed the Church hath always acknowledged, that Chriſt being, as St. Paul expreſſes it, "the "image of the *inviſible* God *," hath been alone made manifeſt to man †. "No man," ſaith St. John, "hath ſeen God at any time; "the only-begotten Son which is in the bo- "ſom of the Father he hath declared him ‡." He it was that appeared to Adam, to Jacob, to Moſes, and to others; who led the Iſraelites through the wilderneſs, and was the *Lord of Hoſts*; who dwelt between the cherubim, and was the viſible *Shekinah*, whoſe preſence filled the Holy Place with glory. This coincidence is ſtrongly illuſtrated by comparing different parts of ſcripture. The Lord ſays "I am *Jehovah*, I change not ‖." The ſame is attributed by St. Paul to Jeſus Chriſt.

* Col. i. 15.

† This is the doctrine of Allix, in his *Judgment of the Jewiſh Church*, and of many of our moſt ſound divines.

‡ Col. i. 15. ‖ Mal. iii 6.

"Jeſus Chriſt, the ſame yeſterday, to-day, "and for ever *." Moſes ſays that the children of Iſrael tempted the Lord Jehovah: the Pſalmiſt ſays they tempted the Moſt High God. But the Apoſtle tells us in his Epiſtle to the Corinthians that "they tempted "Chriſt †." How could they have tempted him if he did not then exiſt? if he were not the ſame Jehovah, the Moſt High God whom in the other paſſages they are ſaid to have tempted? The Pſalmiſt ſaith that it was the Lord God who aſcended up on high, and led captivity captive. But St. Paul ſays it was *Chriſt* who ſo aſcended and ſo triumphed. The Lord Jehovah ſaith, by the prophet Zechariah, "they ſhall look on *me* whom "they have pierced ‡:" but we know who actually was pierced, and to whom that prophecy is applied expreſsly in the Goſpel of St. John. In the Epiſtle to the Hebrews we find that Moſes ſuffered reproach for Chriſt's ſake, that Chriſt was the ſpiritual Rock by which the camp of Iſrael was ſupplied, and many other things are we thus told, denoting plainly that the God of Iſrael

* Heb. xiii. 8. † 1 Cor. x. 9.
‡ Zech. xii. 4, 10.

was

was the ſame who in the latter days came down to viſit his people.

It is alſo certain, that the expectation of the Jews before our Saviour came pointed to the manifeſtation of the *Lord Jehovah* himſelf. This expectation had been expreſsly authorized by the Prophet Malachi, who, ſpeaking in the name of the Lord, had ſaid, "Behold, I will ſend my meſſenger, and he "ſhall prepare the way before *me*;" and immediately after, "*The Lord*, whom ye ſeek, "ſhall ſuddenly come to *his* temple*." Accordingly the devout perſons, at the time of our Saviour's advent, who had careſully ſtudied the prophecies, waited for *the coming of the Lord* †, or for the kingdom of *God*, or for the conſolation of Iſrael; thus variouſly expreſſing the ſame hope that the God of Iſrael would then reveal himſelf, and come down to viſit his people.

There cannot then, it ſeems, remain a doubt, that when the angel gave the Holy Child the title of *the Lord*, it was his purpoſe to inform the people that their expectation was fulfilled; that he who always was *the Lord* had now performed his promiſe,

* Mal. iii. 1. † 1 Cor. i. 7.

and

and had come down among them. A name ſo long appropriated could not, in ſo ſolemn and miraculous a declaration, have been given improperly. The angel called him *the Lord*, his own apoſtles called him ſo, and he himſelf, even in the time of his humiliation, aſſumed the title. Therefore as *the Lord* we worſhip, and adore him: we pray to him; and through his merits, mercy, and interceſſion, hope for our ſalvation.

On this part I have dwelt the more, as being moſt deciſive, as being indeed, when rightly conſidered, ſo convincing, that it appears to leave no ſubterfuge for error; but my text gives other intimations of the ſame great truth.

The title of *Saviour* is almoſt as ſtrictly appropriated, as that of *Lord*. It is the title of the God of Iſrael; and though applied ſo univerſally to Jeſus Chriſt, as to be at preſent perfectly equivalent to his name, is claimed excluſively for *Him*, by whoſe authority the Prophets ſpoke. "I am the Lord thy God, "the Holy One of Iſrael, *thy Saviour* *:" and yet more ſtrongly, uniting both the titles in one ſentence, "I am *the Lord*, beſides me

* Iſa. xliii. 3.

"there

"there is no *Saviour**:" thus ſpeaks Iſaiah. Hoſea in like manner, "Thou ſhalt know no "God but me, for there is *no Saviour* be- "ſides me †."

Chriſt, the only remaining title in the proclamation of the Angel, is ſynonymous exactly with Meſſiah; its meaning is the ſame, *Anointed*; and though the kings of Iſrael had that title by conceſſion, (as temporary and inferior repreſentatives of the great King who was to be revealed) it belonged always, by way of eminence, to the Holy One of Iſrael, whoſe unction was the unlimited effuſion of the Holy Spirit. Thus at a time when there was yet no king in Iſrael, nor any probability of one, the propheteſs Hannah, looking to the diſtant glory of the Saviour, ſaid, "The "Lord ſhall give ſtrength to his King, and "exalt the horn of his *Anointed* ‡:" in which place the original term *Meſſiah* might perhaps as well have been retained. To him, therefore, is the following prophecy applied moſt juſtly, in which the ſplendor of his Deity is announced without reſerve. "Thy throne, "*O God*, is for ever and ever, the ſceptre of

* Iſa. xliii. 11. † Hoſ. xiii. 4.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 10.

"thy

"thy kingdom is a ſceptre of righteouſneſs: "thou loveſt righteouſneſs and hateſt ini-"quity; wherefore, *O God*, thy God hath "*anointed* thee with the oil of gladneſs above "thy fellows*." Whoever was *anointed* for any holy purpoſe, the Meſſiah was ſo more eſpecially, and ſanctified in a ſuperior manner.

You ſee how clearly all theſe things conſpire to one great purpoſe: to declare the true Divinity of Chriſt: and, which way ſoever the argument be taken up, ſuch proofs are found on every ſide as have made very many of the wiſeſt men, and the moſt learned in the holy ſcriptures, aſſent to it, and hold it as their faith. That ſome few of this deſcription have thought otherwiſe ought not to weaken our reliance. The moſt untenable opinions have had their advocates; and whoever ſees to what weak ſhifts even the wiſeſt men have recourſe when they deny the dignity of their Redeemer, will be inclined to look upon that doctrine of denial as among the moſt untenable.

Were it otherwiſe, the queſtion muſt not be decided by the mere weight of human au-

* Pſal. xlv. 7, 9, &c.

thority,

thority. To the judgment of every Chriſtian it is ſubmitted to ſatisfy himſelf what notions he conceives the inſpired Apoſtles to have had concerning it. They call Chriſt uniformly *the Lord*, the import of which title has been now examined. Sometimes *the Lord of Glory*, which admits ſtill leſs of doubtful interpretation. They tell us that "Chriſt "came to *his own*, and his own received "*him not*." How then were the people of Iſrael *his own*, unleſs he was the God of Iſrael, as our enquiries have ſuggeſted? Shall we then be wiſer than the Apoſtles, whoſe wiſdom was not of themſelves, but of divine communication? Forbid it Heaven! The very attempt is deſtructive, and its own appropriate puniſhment attends it,—the blindneſs of infatuated Pride.

We know then whoſe appearance among men we celebrate this day: it was that of the Eternal Son, by whom God made the world, by whom he governs, and by whom he finally will judge it. To deny this is, in fact, to deny the faith; and the name of Chriſtians is aſſumed in vain by thoſe who call this clear and certain doctrine a corruption.

At this time in particular, when we are about to approach the Table of the Lord, let us recollect his dignity before whom we ſhall then appear; and, humbling ourſelves before him, let us intreat his pardon if ever in thought, word, or deed, we may have doubted or denied it.

Now to God, &c.

FINIS.

